

# JACOBS, Jason and PEACOCK, Steven (eds.), *Television Aesthetics and Style*

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Bryan Fuller's decision to bet on a pictorial approach to image in *Hannibal* (NBC, 2013-2015) is not a petty choice. It is an essential part, which turns this piece of fiction into what it really is: the poisonous narration of a seductive cannibal. The way in which the ice cubes fall into the glass of whisky that Roger Sterling prepares for Don Draper after the "It's toasted" moment in *Mad Men* (AMC, 2007-2015) is not something fortuitous, in fact it makes the viewer a part of that victory to the point of feeling as a co-creator of that idea. The fact that the animation style in *Archer* (FX, 2010-) has a direct impact on the complexity of its comedy sequences is not a result of circumstances, on the contrary, it is precisely what allows to set off funny scenarios in a live action sit-com rhythm.

These are some examples of the nuclear importance of aesthetics and style in television series. Although critical film literature has been immensely concerned about the importance of style in film—an element which doubtlessly shapes one of the precious sides of some of the most important gems of the history of the seventh art—in most academic studies concerning this Third Golden Age series we miss this kind of approach. If certainly some of the most important series of our time stand out because of their dramatic complexity or the elaboration of the authorial concept they carry on (among other aspects of vital interest), style issues are not one of the most written about, and when they are tackled it is always from a strictly formalistic point of view.

Jason Jacobs y Steven Peacock, acknowledging this lack, present us in *Television Aesthetics and Style* a collection of essays concerning this subject, reflections around different contemporary television fictions focusing on aesthetics—an element they doubtlessly see as fundamental. The editors of this text articulate in four parts the almost thirty interventions and the different questions set out by the notion of style on television, based on the different television genres—something specially valuable since it permits readers to have a complete panorama.

In the first part, conceptual issues are tackled, from stylistic analysis and what lies within it, including the dangers of letting these kind of issues aside, to the most suitable use of the fittest nomenclature to use in television aesthetic analysis—what do we mean with *cinematic*? Is it legitimate to talk about *aesthetics* in television?—in texts as interesting as those by Jason Mittell and Sarah Cardwell. This first section is especially interesting because it is where important questions around starting concepts for the study of this area are discussed, basic approaches to legitimize the research and to generate an interesting academic debate.

In the second segment several texts devoted to the role of style in television sit-coms, such as *Arrested Development* (FOX, 2003-2006) or the above-named animation series *Archer*, are gathered. On the other hand, the third part focuses on drama. Some case studies stand out, such as the use of the *flashforward* device in *Breaking Bad* (AMC, 2008-2013) or the utilization of aesthetics in *Boardwalk Empire* (HBO, 2010-2014). Finally the fourth section presents some reflections around historical series and non-fiction, with the analysis of diverse titles such as realities focused in dance or post-war documentaries in British television, by Ieuan Frankin.

The approach of this volume stands out for its choice of not working exclusively with American-produced big hits, but also with British TV. This book also presents an important corpus of chapters signed by some of the most renowned contemporary researchers on television studies, and we must underline the passion for the subject sensed in each text, judiciously analyzing and justifying their statements from a formal view and an academic rigour.

In conclusion it is a very necessary book for the study of television fiction works, outlined from a respectful stand towards the formalistic tradition of previous studies but openly working in a line of research—television aesthetics—that has been already accused in several occasions of being a *pre-structuralist danger*. The good work practices of the editors and participating

writers solve every doubt in an arena, the aesthetics and its use in television series, still precariously explored by media scholars –an already not-so-emerging field which furthermore is in full transformation. Jacobs and Peacock set out a very intertextual and fluid standpoint on series as artistic pieces of work, moving away from confined formalism and with an open perspective towards different ways of tackling aesthetics, creating a text from academia with a clear democratic desire to reach television lovers. •