

When TV Series permeate and produce Reality. Preliminary Reflections on Performativity of the «Small Screen»

The last decades witnessed the development of a «new narrative formula» in the world of TV series, able to influence opinions and behaviours and to stimulate in spectators a sort of «state of immersion». Furthermore, some series end up with having a more tangible performative effect, realizing a state of permeation of reality which can be materialized for instance in the fiction induced tourism, but also with the creation of «public forums» where TV viewers mix up political opinions and their private sphere. Nevertheless, «permeation» only constitutes a first step of performativity, while a second stage – «production of reality» – is reached in some cases when locations physically take on some characteristic features of a TV series. Which are then the factors and mechanisms that trigger performativity? A possible key to answer the question can be found applying Berques' concept of médiance to the analysis of this phenomenon.

Quando la fiction permea e produce la realtà. Riflessioni preliminari sulla performatività del «piccolo schermo»

Gli ultimi decenni hanno visto lo sviluppo di una «nuova formula narrativa» nel mondo della fiction, in grado di influenzare opinioni e comportamenti e di stimolare negli spettatori una sorta di «stato di immersione». Inoltre, alcune fictions finiscono per avere un effetto performativo più tangibile, realizzando uno stato di permeazione della realtà che può concretizzarsi ad esempio nel turismo indotto dalla fiction stessa, ma anche nella creazione di «forum pubblici» dove i telespettatori mescolano opinioni politiche e sfera privata. Tuttavia, la «permeazione» costituisce solo un primo livello della performatività, mentre un secondo stadio – la «produzione della realtà» – viene raggiunto in alcuni casi allorché determinate locations assumono fisicamente alcune caratteristiche di una fiction. Quali sono dunque i fattori e i meccanismi che innescano la performatività? Una possibile chiave per rispondere alla domanda può essere trovata applicando il concetto di médiance di Berque all'analisi di questo fenomeno.

Quand la série télévisée pénètre et produit la réalité. Réflexions préliminaires sur la performativité du « petit écran »

Les dernières décennies ont vu le développement d'une « nouvelle formule narrative » dans le monde de la série télévisée, capable d'influencer les opinions et les comportements et de susciter chez le spectateur une sorte d'« état d'immersion ». De plus, certaines séries télévisées finissent par avoir un effet performatif plus tangible, réalisant un état de perméabilité de la réalité qui peut se concrétiser non seulement par le tourisme télévisuel, mais aussi par la création de « forums publics » où les téléspectateurs mélangent opinions politiques et sphère privée. Néanmoins, la « pénétration » ne constitue qu'une première étape de la performativité, tandis qu'une seconde étape – la « production de réalité » – est atteinte quand, dans certains cas, les lieux acquièrent physiquement certains traits caractéristiques d'une série télévisée. Quels sont donc les facteurs et les mécanismes qui déclenchent la performativité ? Répondre à cette question semble possible en appliquant le concept de médiance de Berque à l'analyse de ce phénomène.

Keywords: TV series, mechanism of performativity, médiance

Parole chiave: fiction, meccanismo di performatività, médiance

Mots-clés: série télévisée, mécanisme de performativité, médiance

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Where would we rather live «by proxy»?
In a world we are familiar with, or one that disorients us?
And with whom?
Our brothers or the heroes who enchant us?
[Jost, 2004, 58]

1. Introduction: TV Series lay Siege to the «Public Sphere»

In the last decades, together with a marked increase in the number of television series, a twofold interest for contemporary fiction has been developing in various disciplines such as sociology, philosophy and semiology... On the one hand, TV series propose innovative and more articulated scenarios and on the other, they become the expression of social questions and tensions and in some cases of a quest for approval about some controversial issues. For example, in the last few years, issues like homosexuality, divorce, blended families, minorities have been constantly included in most European fiction productions that are transmitted not only on privately-held or pay TV channels, but also on major public networks, triggering reactions in the press and, more generally, fomenting lively debate on social media.

In the field of Italian geographical research, a recent essay by F. Amato and E. dell'Agnese adds an interesting geo-urban and geo-political perspective to the analysis of American serials (2014)². In the US, TV series have come to be considered the «seventh power» because they are able to influence opinions and sometimes even transmit political ideas. They do it less explicitly than on the Net or TV news because they work on a more unconscious level, but for this reason they are often even more effective (Barbiero, 2012). Furthermore, making reference to the mentioned works of F. Amato and E. Dell'Agnese (Amato and Dell'Agnese, 2014; Dell'Agnese, 2011), T. Graziano underlines how – with some specificities within individual countries – TV fictions play a part into a series of dynamics ranging from local to global, managing to establish themselves as a relevant factor for «making the nation an interpretative community», able of speaking the same language and to share a «common baggage of myths, stories and values» (Graziano, 2017).

In this paper, the focus is instead more specifically concentrated on the mechanisms of performativity that can germinate, in some cases, from the world of TV series. The main goal, at the heart of the reflection, is trying to understand why some

TV series (and no others) are performative, that is to say able to generate significant and profound reactions from viewers, accompanied by more or less noteworthy impacts on the real sites where the series are set and shot. Those reactions can have a various nature: from the simple curiosity to visit one of these sites, to the taking of political positions in the public debate, from the irrepressible desire to really live – even for a brief period – in the world of fiction (to frequent the same shops, to walk in the same streets, to eat the same foods, to contemplate the same panorama and so on) to the actual geographical transformation of some sites. To answer this question about what's behind fiction's performativity, the hypothesis proposed is that this is not linked to success in term of audience (i.e. television ratings) nor to the photographic or screenplay qualities of the audiovisual product, but is instead linked to the *médiance* given off from specific TV series, that can be perceived and acknowledged by spectators.

The first part of the article focuses on the conceptual aspects and explains the interest of applying the concept of *médiance* to the analysis of performative series. The second part is dedicated to some empirical cases where the selected fictions concern both urban and rural contexts of European countries. Thus, the main contribution of this work is meant to be a theoretical attempt to link the as-yet-unconnected scholarly debates around fiction performativity & *médiance*, using a number of carefully chosen examples to show the potential of this proposal for the analysis of further case studies.

2. A «New Narrative Formula»: Metaphor or Paraphrase of Real Life?

Before analyzing TV series' performative effects, it is necessary to retrace the recent developments in the world of series that favored the growing and empowerment of these phenomena.

In Italy (Buonanno, 1994), as well as in many other countries, the small screen has witnessed the unquestionable development of a «new narrative formula», a hybrid between two styles: the *soap opera*, traditionally aimed at an afternoon, female audience, and the *cop story*, mainly aimed at an evening, male audience (Esquenazi, 2004). This «new» genre, which has been developing roughly since the 1980s, requires series to find a compromise and a synthesis between scenari-



os based on a closed and permanent (but with unstable balances) community, where action is linked to complex and never ending stories about love and family, and scenarios centered around straightforward and segmented stories, linked to one prominent character, whose psychological implications are mainly reduced to maintaining the order (Innocenti and Pescatore, 2008; Iovane, 2009). In this sense, the «starting point» of modern TV fiction is undoubtedly the famous series Dallas «If we are to believe the plethora of studies, commentaries and warnings from journalists, critics and even politicians, the beginning of the 1980s was marked for the world's television viewing public by a new, spectacular phenomenon: Dallas. This unique status is due first and foremost to the extraordinary but undeniable popularity achieved by this American dramatic serial about a rich Texan oil family. That popularity has been wellnigh worldwide: in over ninety countries, ranging from Turkey to Australia, from Hong Kong to Great Britain [...] It became the symbol of a new television age» (Ang, 1985, pp. 1-2). Over the years the genre has developed, combining vertical stories that run out in a single episode and horizontal stories that are typical of serials (*déroutement* of the story from episode to episode). All this gives greater depth to the evolutionary universe of TV series.

The success in terms of audience that a serial finds with the public is due to a number of elements. In the philosopher J.-M. Schaeffer's opinion «l'état d'immersion fictionnelle» (a state of immersion in fiction) is essential. According to his theory, a spectator is more likely to be drawn into a world created by others, the more he can interpret that world with his common knowledge (Schaeffer, 1999). This immersion can be deeper when the world of fiction and that of the spectator echo off each other, i.e. if the lives of the characters can correspond to «metaphors or paraphrases» of those of the spectators (Esquenazi, 2013)³. Therefore it is not simply a case of identifying oneself, but rather of developing a sort of empathic drive. From this perspective, the new kind of TV series is more and more engaging as its universe expands (characters, relationships, scripts...). According to the interpretation of American art critic A. Danto, the strength of the connection between serials and television viewers is directly linked to how rich the universe of the fiction is. Television viewers get into this universe deeper if they know its contents and above all if the links among the elements of

the fiction appear to be as complex as those in real life. The more the universe of the fiction approaches the complexity of real life, the more it is able to interact with it in practical terms (Esquenazi, 2013). Pushing this concept to its limit, but often with good reason, some scholars talk about coexistence of the real world and the world of fiction, that, far from being mutually exclusive, sometimes not only coexist, but are even indispensable to each other (Bardière, 2012). All these considerations stimulate a deeper investigation on the performative phenomena induced by some fictions.

3. What triggers TV Series Performativity? The Concept of *médiance* as a Possible Interpretative Tool

The concept of performativity and its variations (performative and performance), whose origin is to be attributed to the works of J. L. Austin, especially the ones on the «performative utterance», has generated a long and complex debate. We are not entering into the details of the controversies (Culler 2000; Hillis Miller 2007; Moati 2009) related to the conceptual developments, to the creation of the theory of performativity (Derrida, 1972; Butler, 1989) and the performativity theory (Hillis Miller, 2007) or to the elaboration of the *Performance Studies* (Schechner, 2002), while we would rather specify the use we made here of these concepts.

The main common point between all these different approaches is of course that of «putting into action». Originally, «The term “performative” [...] is derived, of course, from “perform” [...] it indicates that the output of the utterance is the performing of an action» (Austin, 1962, p. 6). Later on, Derrida (1972) widens the reflection on the notion of performativity giving it a more operative meaning and especially opening the application of this concept beyond the linguistic domain. Admittedly, he considers it for any writing process, but the notion of writing is to be understood in the broad sense, including all forms of cultural expression. This opening has been pursued particularly in Butler's work, who later developed the social and cultural dimensions of performativity (Butler, 1989 and 1993).

Another interesting aspect recurring in different works (Austin, 1962; Schechner, 2002; Hillis Miller, 2007) is the idea of an event understood as a break in continuity. Austin speaks of an incident:



«The uttering of the words is, indeed, usually a, or even the, leading incident in the performance of the act» (Austin, 1962, p. 8); Hillis Miller insists on the break between present and past as an opening to the future. Transposing this idea, we can say that the performative effect of certain fictions is clearly manifested with a before and an after. In case of performative TV series there is actually a given reality before the series and another after: series can in fact induce changes in the concerned physical sites and/or more widely in the public (examples will be developed later in this paper).

In addition to this, a final and particularly interesting aspect is the focus on the role of the audience and its importance in the performative process. Indeed, whether it is in the linguistic perspective of Austin (see the example of the wedding, 1962) or the theatrical one of Rancière (see role of the spectator, 2008), it is the audience itself who guarantees the performativity of a statement, an act, a gesture, etc. Applying the same reasoning to this work, we can say it is the constitution of a receptive and proactive audience that makes series performative.

Schechner (2002) goes further and makes a good parallel to the theatrical world by using the work of Goffman (*The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, 1959) and states that the scene operates according to the same principles as real life. Implicitly, this means that any performativity requires an appropriation by the subject: the «self» doubles, appropriates and learns the codes and the behaviours, transforms them, repeats them, etc.

The pre-established pattern of action which is unfolded during a performance and which may be presented or played through on other occasions may be called a «part» or a «routine» [Goffman, 1959, p. 15].

In the case of TV series, the performative process comes into play twice: a first time on the side of fiction, which proposes once again a new life (with specific characteristics on which we will return afterwards in the paper) and a second time on the side of spectators, who reappropriate the life of the fiction and who in turn take up the codes and behaviours (etc.) of fiction and repropose them or replay them in the sites where the TV series was set. The spectator becomes a performer. But precisely, what is the mechanism that makes series performative?

The before mentioned hypothesis that we want to develop in this work is linked to the application

of the concept of *médiance* to the analysis of performative series. The use of this concept in the geographical studies was introduced by the French geographer Augustin Berque, who translated the Japanese word *fûdosei* into French. Actually, this very rich concept comes originally from a first elaboration made by the Japanese philosopher Watsuji Tetsurô who uses the word in 1935:

Fûdo, a word composed of the two logograms «wind» and «earth», means the ensemble of characters of a territory, rather from the physical point of view (relief, climate, hydrology, etc.), but sometimes also from a social point of view, that is to say including the customs and traditions of that territory. Thus *fûdosei* [-*sei* is the equivalent of *-hood* in English] conceptualizes this set of characters. One could say that it's the *idiosyncrasie* [set of affective and intellectual dispositions that compose the personality and temperament of an individual] of that territory. The essential point is that this *idiosyncrasie* assumes the gaze of the inhabitants on the phenomena taking place in their environment. They feel them, interpret them and live them in a certain way [Berque, 2010, pp. 201-202].

For Berque, «*médiance* is a universal existential structure, but the concrete forms it takes have always been specific to one milieu or another»: a *milieu* doesn't exist by itself, it only exists when it is represented, acted and lived. In Berque's approach, at the end of the twentieth century, the *milieu* is understood as «the relationship of a society to space and nature [...] both physical and phenomenologic» (Berque, 2000, p. 48) and therefore both natural and cultural, subjective and objective, collective and individual (Berque, 1986). The *médiance* correspond to the *ensemble* of the affordances offered by a certain *milieu* and of a mediation between the human activities and the *milieu* acted through these same affordances, mediation which gives sense to the *milieu* itself. The *médiance* is the character, the temper of a *milieu*.

The point of view of *médiance* includes, obviously enough, the characteristics of the *milieu* but through the representations made by human groups. The mediation that we mentioned above, which Berque also calls *trajection*, is not a simple addition; it is an important part of the *médiance*. The *trajection* is the dynamic part, the mesological and historical process (Berque, 2000) which allows *inter alia*:

to operate indefinitely the integration of heterogeneous time scales, thus conferring a unitary sense (a *médiance*) on the functioning of a given *milieu*. This integration includes physical aspects (energy



flows, trophic chains, displacements of people...) and phenomenologic aspects (perception of nature, [anthropological] path [Durand, 1960], representations of space ...), all in perpetual correspondence and determining each other in a way that is both symbolic and ecological⁵ [...] All along the deployment of this «mediation process », in which myth and history compose each other, society perceives its *milieu* according to the use it makes of it; conversely, she uses it according to the perception she has of it. Phenomenological matrices (the perception and interpretation patterns of the milieu) thus continue to generate physical imprints (shaping the milieu) which, in turn, influence these matrices, and so on [Berque, 2000, pp. 42-44].

The hypothesis proposed in this work is that TV series are all the more performative the more they present a complete *médiance* that can be perceived by the viewers. And that is precisely what constitutes the triggering factor for the fiction performativity. In this perspective, two stages seem to stand out in the performativity process: the first corresponds to «permeation» and the second to «production» of reality. In next sections we try to explain this process by appealing to some specific examples.

4. When TV Series permeate Reality: From Tourism to «Public Forum»

A very interesting case is the one of the German television series *Donna Leon*, which is entirely set in today's Venice and centered around the character of Commissario Brunetti. This serial is very successful in Germany, but, like the original novels⁶, has never been translated into Italian, on request of its author. The ups and downs of the Commissario have triggered a new kind of tourism in Venice:

The Germans [are] mad about Donna Leon [...] arrive in Venice not to follow into Byron's, Casanova's or Thomas Mann's footsteps. For some time [instead] they have been visiting the Venetian Lagoon to discover Commissario Guido Brunetti's locations [«Italia Oggi», July 20, 2013].

Now there are maps of Venice that mix together with no distinction the monuments, the places of historical interest and the TV series locations, which have become themselves «characters» of the series together with Brunetti and other protagonists. On various tourist sites you can also see photos of places in Venice with captions related to this series, for example the caption of the Ca'

Foscari University pictures reads «the university where the wife of Brunetti teaches».

The tourist trails that follow the footsteps of their «hero» end up in a certain way, «feeding» even more the strange story of this television series, whose main effect on German tourists is certainly not that of stimulating the desire to discover the «real» Venice. These tourists are not only looking for the «location» that they imagined through the series, but mainly to «live it», to «experience it», to «savor it», or even to acquire the values associated to it. These locations become actual instruments of mediation, if not the mediation itself, between the universe of fiction and television viewers. They are not only the locations that can be «seen» in the TV series: they become the actual *entre-deux* between the two worlds, as in the «bridge and door» in Simmel's metaphor. They are the connection between what is «separated» (the bridge) and at the same time also what separates what is «connected» (the door). This shows that series like *Donna Leon* have undeniably a performative effect, realizing a state of permeation of the reality of a certain area, with the relevant mix of what is real and the world of fiction.

In this regard, however, it is definitively important to note that in this TV series a multitude of elements are inserted that have no relevance neither for the development of the story nor for the solution of the detective plot: Brunetti's ramblings on his passion for history and the Greek and Roman classics; his acquaintances with the old Venetian aristocracy and with the world of art and music; the habit of buying the local newspaper every day, which he hates, only for the pleasure to criticize it with irony; his original comments on the most diverse places in Venice and on how they are experienced by tourists, inhabitants and shopkeepers; his wife's passion for cooking (among other things, recipe books like *Brunetti's cookbook* or *At table with Brunetti* have been published); etc. But it is mainly thanks to all these elements, how they are linked to each other, repeated and developed during the various episodes, that the this TV series manages to present the viewer with a complete *médiance* of the *milieu* and thus becomes able to trigger the performativity.

The case of *Donna Leon* is certainly not a sporadic one. In the *Commissario Montalbano* series, for instance, the mechanisms of *médiance* and performativity are very similar to the ones we just described above. It is thanks to these mechanisms that this series, exported with success in



many countries, has also contributed to the re-development of Sicily's image⁷. Actually, far too often cinema or television productions have put forward a stereotype that does not correspond to the more complex and articulated reality of the island, showing only a violent and backward image of it. Films and television series emphasizing negative externalities for the perception of the location can actually cause a progressive and considerable decrease in incoming tourist flow and for an extended period of time, as reported by various professionals working in the tourism sector. This is exactly what had happened in Sicily, also because of the worldwide success of some productions that were set there, such as the television series *Piovra* and *The Godfather* films by Italo-American director Francis Ford Coppola.

On the other hand, the powerful performative effects of television series can also stimulate the revitalization of an area by playing a differentiating role compared with a previous image that is not necessarily negative, but which has been superseded. Other successful Italian series being set on little islands of the South of Italy (Capri and Ponza), succeed in creating within the collective consciousness an alternative perception of life in those places that is not the classic and rather stereotypical one of sea, sun and holidays, and have somehow contributed to «deseasonalize» the stream of tourists to those islands.

In the last few years the study of social, political and economic interests that fictions can trigger has been drawing more and more the attention of scholars in various disciplines, in particular the geographers who developed researches and reflections at various levels, but often linked by the same «*fil rouge*: television works as an important means of communication of the territory» (Graziano and Nicosia, 2017, p. 11). Further to scholars, the attractive factors of film locations has also drawn the greatest attention of local authorities and governance, involved in the redevelopment of certain areas, ranging from city neighbourhoods to isolated hamlets, to sites of potential nature conservation interest, but also places that are fundamentally anonymous without any particular historical or cultural relevance. In this direction, important was the creation of film commissions, which aim to attract at regional level audiovisual productions to their respective territories and whose work has already been extensively studied (Cucco and Richeri, 2013; Puglisi, 2013; Nicosia, 2015; Irimiás, 2017).

However, this first level of performativity of a serial (permeation of reality) does not necessarily manifest itself only in the field of tourism: it can also do it at a social level or by influencing local politics. Among the many available examples, in Italy we can quote one from *Ispettore Coliandro*: its 2006 episode *Vendetta Cinese* (Chinese revenge), set in Bologna's «Chinatown», triggered a wave of controversies in the city, mainly stirred up by the same Chinese community, so much so that the author, Carlo Lucarelli, in the end had to apologize, but only after having reminded everybody of a patent obviousness – that clearly was not as obvious for the various communities of Bologna – i.e. that it was a work of fiction (by name and by nature) and not a documentary:

Vendetta cinese is a *noir*, a thriller, as it is commonly known, and as such does what a *noir* does: it exaggerates tones, it increases contrasts, it creates a caricature in black of reality [...] a *noir* should be a cue for reflection. The rest is fiction [«La Repubblica», September 01, 2006].

This incident reminds us of words of Schechner «As play acts, performative are not “true” or “false”, “right” or “wrong”. They happen» (Schechner, 2002, p. 127).

Very similar but even more striking is the case of the popular television series *Midsomer Murders*⁸ that sparked lively debate in the press and on British social media. The series itself became a sort of «public forum» with its own political aspect but in which, unlike that which occurred in the Greek agorà, problems from the private sphere were also presented, thus confirming the intrinsic tendency of our era for what Pierre Chambat called «publicizing the intimate» (Bryon-Portet, 2012). The criticism, which even reached the top echelons of British political circles, attacked the lack of ethnic minorities among the show's stars. Many others replied that this was a red herring, not because the series was the product of free artistic expression, just as a novel or piece of music, but because, they felt, the vast majority of the inhabitants of England's small country villages are white. A discussion born around a TV series was transformed into a debate about the current state of British society and the stereotype of Englishness and the notion of whether or not it is worth preserving, thus confirming the increasing difficulty of maintaining separate the entangled worlds of fiction and reality. As the «Daily Mail» noted in March 2011, at the height of the debate, «at a time when



Japan has been flattened by natural disasters and when Libya is in flames, it seems more than a little surreal that the news agenda has been gripped by a story about a fictitious village somewhere in the English shires». Only a few responded to the ethnic minority controversy by mentioning the artistic nature of fiction, such as that seen in the words of journalist Quentin Letts: *Midsomer Murders* does not aim to «reflect modern Britain» and it is bonkers to expect any drama so to do. The program is a work of stylised imagination...

5. From Permeation to «Production of Reality»

The phenomenon of «permeation» described above, however, only constitutes the first stage, a necessary step, but not enough to reach complete performativity: a second stage is reached with the move from permeation to «production of reality». The transition between the two phenomena is not clear and immediate, but in some way progressive and not always identifiable in time, although it reveals itself more clearly when, in a certain location, transformation processes are triggered that make that location take on some characteristic features of the TV series in question. Usually it is the same «local actors» in that location who, sometimes even unconsciously, look for (and want those coming from outside to find) the image of that location created by the series. It is not a modern television series, but representative in this sense is the case of Brescello, in the Reggio Emilia province in Italy, where the stories of Don Camillo and Peppone have completely shaped the urban landscape, so much so that it looks like an old disused set, which every day draws coaches of French and German tourists to a small and *a priori* anonymous village of the Po valley (more or less 50 000 tourists/year, following the tourism office of Brescello).

people don't come to Brescello for its things, to see its monuments or works of art. People come to Brescello to breathe in the atmosphere of an Italy that is no longer, but about which everyone feels very nostalgic [«Il Giornale di Reggio», July 21, 2012].

The image of post-war Italy as seen through the stories of Don Camillo and Peppone – an Italy in which the great cultural conflict between Communists and Catholics found its synthesis, in a way projecting the country towards a period of prosperity and development – is a powerful image

that has remained in the collective conscience, not only in Italy, but in many other European countries which for decades watched on TV the stories written by Giovannino Guareschi. In November 2011, in a period of financial crisis for Italy, in expressing his confidence in the government of Mario Monti who at the time had the support of both the right and the left parties, Olli Rehn, Vice-President of the European Commission, said: «I have always loved Italian culture. As a boy I read the books of Guareschi and I like to think that, today, both Don Camillo and Peppone would support the Monti government...» A more recent demonstration is the tremendous success in 2017 of the German-language musical inspired by Guareschi's stories. In reporting about it, the local Reggio Emilia newspaper rightly noted:

In Don Camillo and Peppone [...] we find today that «purity» which has almost been lost and makes us nostalgic for a world in which rivalry was not placed above the greater good. Further proof that these two friends/enemies are the bearers of a positive message has been provided by Pope Francis who mentioned them for their simplicity and common touch [«Gazzetta di Reggio», June 1, 2017].

If in the case of Brescello the capacity of transmitting to viewers a whole *médiance* is again the key factor, the ability to create a powerful sense of nostalgia for a world in which we would still like to live today can be an additional element in increasing the performative effect. We have seen it with Don Camillo, but this aspect can also be seen in the *Midsomer Murders* series cited above. Many scholars have analysed the rural nostalgia in British cultural life, but the tremendous international appeal of this series is largely due to a new phenomenon, i.e., the emergence of nostalgia for Britain's rural past among the non-British and more precisely that which Jonathan Simon calls «wilful nostalgia», a sentiment that is even more powerful and typical of postmodernity (Bergin, 2012). In fact, it is no coincidence that the area of Buckinghamshire, where the series was shot, has itself been shaped by the series and actually transformed into the imaginary Midsomer county, with its maps, websites and Midsomer guided tours that attract fans from around the world. Even on the main page of the official website of the city of Wallingford⁹ (Causton in the series), appears the icon of *Midsomer Murders* where it is possible to find information, pictures and maps of the series.



Actually, there is a so close connection between reality and fiction that you can hardly distinguish between the two. There are countless foreign fans who talk about the «unusual charm the English are able to cultivate with modernity», of the «old British way of life», the «sweet, enchanting life of the English countryside». If they also live in the countryside, these fans often attempt to reproduce – where they live – the rural landscapes typical of this series. This means that performative effects can take place not only in the series locations but also where spectators live (rif. spectators who become performers).

6. Conclusion

Which are the factors and mechanisms that can trigger TV series performativity? This is the question we tried to answer in this work. The great quality of a television program, in terms of screenplay, actors, cinematography itself, is far from sufficient to produce the phenomenon, which is absolutely not the obligatory outcome of a famous serial neither: TV series can have enormous success in terms of audience without then moving on to the stage of performative success. Nobody would go on holiday to the US to visit the locations of *The Bold and the Beautiful*, probably the most famous Soap Opera in the world¹⁰.

A fundamental requirement is certainly for the series and its characters to be linked to a space on various levels, from local to global. Without these multiple levels it is difficult to achieve the creation of a microcosm, although part of a larger context, which makes the setting of a serial a true and proper «location».

Furthermore, important are the significant forms¹¹ diffused by the series: decisive is its capacity to return or not a location in its fullest sense, an identifiable space, shaped by and full of socio-economical, cultural and political values. Decisive is also its ability to offer the mechanisms for the construction of sensory effects in that location.

But the hypothesis we presented in this work is that the key factor for a performative series is its capability of presenting the television viewer with a complete *médiance* of the world it relates. This concept refers to the complex relationships that are continuously re-defined between societies and their *milieux*, relationships that are at the same time subjective and objective, physical and phenomenological, ecological and symbolic

(Berque, 2000 and 2010). The *médiance* also refers to the meanings and values – given by the societies to these relationships – influencing their evolution. According to Berque, what characterizes the relationship between a human group and the earth space is the mutual impregnation of the place and what is in it (Berque, 2000 and 2010). I applied the concept of *médiance* – created in a completely different field of research – to my analysis and I actually found out that the series activating a process of performativity present a strong common point: they are all able to develop a whole *médiance*.

The TV series performativity is by sure a field of research still wide open and far away from being exhausted, but applying Berque's considerations to the geographical reading of fiction, one can finally add that the location of a performative serial is not only a *topos* (a place which can be separated from the elements found in it or, in other terms, a frame), but a *chôra*, that is a dynamic place that takes part in the life of what is there and from whose shared evolution something different is going to be born (Berque, 2010).

The major interest of further developing this research in the future is related to the continuous increase of the number of series in any kind of media and thus probably of the number of performative series, that will have an impact on the real life/world.

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Notes

¹ All quotations from a text originally written in French or Italian have been translated into English by the author.

² For Italian TV series, see the work of Graziano and Nicosia published in 2017.

³ This aspect is at least in part linked to the question of metaphorical identification that has been studied in depth for over twenty years.

⁴ <https://www.pca-stream.com/en/articles/augustin-berque-from-mediance-to-places-98> (ultimo accesso: 23.VII.2019).

⁵ In the context of *mediance*, the environment is structurally part of the being, even if they remain of course two different entities:

Since our medial body – as distinctively human rather than as simply living – is specifically the exteriorization of our animal body into a social body constituted by technical and symbolic systems, it is self-evident that the social body is not subject to the mortality of the individual animal body. Technique survives the artisan; the poem survives the poet; the city survives the inhabitants; language, those who speak it; and the nation survives those who die for their country. In short the medial being survives the individual being [Berque, 2019, p. 81].

⁶ The American author has given her own name to that of the German version of the television series *Donna Leon*.

⁷ Concerning the image of Sicily, see the works of Clausi and others, 2007; Di Betta, 2015; Nicosia, 2017.

⁸ «Perhaps the single greatest success here is ITV's long-running feature-length series, *Midsomer Murders* (Bentley Productions), one of the United Kingdom's most successful television exports, having been sold to 225 territories since its first UK transmission in 1997 (Sherwin, 2013)» (Ruth McElroy (2017), p. 18).

⁹ <https://www.wallingfordtowncouncil.gov.uk> (ultimo accesso: 23.VII.2019).

¹⁰ Also known as *B&B* is an American television soap opera created by William J. Bell and Lee Phillip Bell. Starting in 1987, it has become the most-watched soap in the world, with an audience of an estimated 26.2 million viewers (Shea, Danny, *The World's Number One Show: CSI*, «The HuffPost»), June 17, 2008, <https://www.huffpost.com> (ultimo accesso: 23.VII.2019).

¹¹ See A. J. Greimas's signification theory.

