



# Critical Studies in Television Conference 2024

## Programme

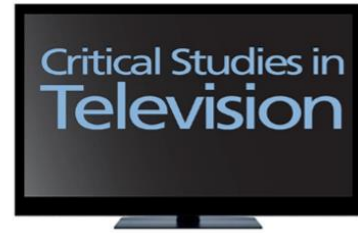
24 June – 5 July 2024

Online

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# Welcome



The International Journal of Television Studies

Dear all,

Welcome to another Critical Studies in Television Conference – this year purely online, and ‘slow’ to enable as many of us to take part. This year, the topic is the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals that are meant to guide humankind towards a more equitable future on a liveable planet. They address questions of health, society, culture and the distribution of resources while also being aware of the urgency to address climate change. As a key communicator of human aspiration, as a tool to educate and inform, but also as an industry fraught with inequality and often accused to pandering to ‘valuable’ taste communities i.e. those of economic and other advantage, television emerges as a key site where our ability to respond to those aspirations can be assessed. How does television respond to the climate crisis? How does it aim to reduce poverty and inequalities by, for example, addressing local working conditions, offering traineeships to disadvantaged groups or address issues of outsourcing ethically? What steps does the industry take to reduce its carbon (and other polluting) footprint? How does it promote peace?

These and many other questions relating to television and the Sustainable Development Goals will be at the centre of the slow conference, which will be spread out over two weeks. Edge Hill University is again proud to collaborate with *Critical Studies in Television* to bring this conference to you. We are looking forward to an inspiring two weeks.

All the best,

The CST Conference Team.



## Programme Overview

To join the session, please click the links below

Week starting 24 June

Monday, 24 June	Tuesday, 25 June	Wednesday, 26 June	Thursday, 27 June	Friday, 28 June
	<b>9am</b> <a href="#">Sustainability as Representation</a> Blythe Stevenson Worthy, Ellie Power and David Levente Palatinus	<b>9am</b> <a href="#">The Industry and Climate Change</a> Hilary Weston-Jones, Alexa Scarlata and Ramon Lobato, and Mary-Joy van der Deure		
<b>12.30pm</b> <a href="#">Opening Gambit</a>	<b>12.30pm</b> <a href="#">Equality and Diversity in Representation</a> Mareike Jenner and Maria Piqueras Perez		<b>1pm</b> <a href="#">Roundtable: Issues of health and wellbeing in television</a> Lauren Beck	<b>1pm</b> <a href="#">Politics and/of Representation</a> Will Stanford Abbiss, Glòria Salvadó- Corretger and Fran Benavente, and Sónia de Sá
<b>Afternoon, 2pm</b> <a href="#">Television, Climate Change and Knowledge</a> Melissa Beattie, Dorothea Burato and Evdokia Stefanopoulou		<b>3pm</b> <a href="#">Representing Climate Change: An industry perspective</a> Jess Moore, Bent-Jorgen Perlmutter and Zoe Fuad		<b>4pm</b> <a href="#">Screening Discussion</a> led by Sarah Lahm

Week starting 1 July

Monday, 1 July	Tuesday, 2 July	Wednesday, 3 July	Thursday, 4 July	Friday, 5 July
			<b>9am</b> <a href="#">Work and Representation</a> Christina Wilkins, Alexander Beare and Robert Boucaut, and Tatiana Chervyakova	
<b>1pm</b> <a href="#">Keynote: Anne Marit Waade</a>	<b>1pm</b> <a href="#">Representation of Climate Change Stories</a> Daniel T. Ezegwu and colleagues, Jelena Krivosic and Paolo Carelli and Anna Sfardini	<b>1pm</b> <a href="#">Consumption and the Industry</a> Fallen Matthews, Nino Domazetovikj and Vincenzo De Masi	<b>1pm</b> <a href="#">Closing workshop</a>	

## Our Keynote

Anne Marit Waade, Aarhus  
University, Denmark

### What has television to do with climate?



#### Green screens and green shooting

A crucial interdisciplinary research field is emerging focusing on the relationship between media and environment, in some contexts framed as ‘environmental media studies’ as part of environmental humanities, and in others ‘Anthropocene television studies’, ‘cli-fi’, or just ‘green screens’ and ‘green shooting’ (Doyle, Redclift & Woodgate 2011; Kääpä & Vaughan 2022; Leyda 2021; Iménez-Morales & Lopera-Mármol 2021 +2022; Saunders 2024; Soernesen & Noonan 2022; Souch 2020). In this talk I will map the different approaches to study and understand the relationship between television and climate. I will include both how *television content* represents and contributes to the ongoing societal discussion about environmental issues (green screens), as well as how the screen industry considers climate issues in the *production practices* (green shooting). Based on my own research on Nordic television drama series and screened landscapes, I will give some examples of both green screens and green shooting. Nordic noir and Arctic noir have in many cases dealt with climate issues as part of the narrative and the landscape aesthetics. In my talk I will draw on my work on the Danish series *Borgen – Power and Glory* (2022, DR/Netflix) taking place in Greenland, and *Midnight Sun* (2016, Nice/Canal+) set in Kiruna, as good examples of green screens and Anthropocene television drama (Grønlund & Waade 2024; Souch, Saunders and Waade 2023; Waade 2020). However, green screens are not restricted to fiction, but encompass also other kinds of television content as news, documentaries, and factual entertainment.

When it comes to green shooting, there are different kinds of considerations and research approaches, from critical political economy viewpoints, industry regulations, case-based production studies, technological and economic angles, to environmental production activism and community work. In this context I will give three examples, all of them focusing on technological potential and contradictions in screen productions; The first is the screen tourism app *Detect Aarhus* (2019-2021), the second is the blue sky crime series *White Sand* (TV2/Viaplay, 2021) shot on the Westcoast of Denmark,

and the last example is *Trom* (Viaplay, 2021) set on the Faeroe Island and with an extensive use of drone shots. In general, on location shooting and screen production are not particularly climate friendly, it requires electric power, tracks, transport of the crew, flying in creatives, managing catering and trash and sometimes access to vulnerable locations and communities. Based on my examples, I will discuss to what extent different kinds of screen technologies can contribute to greening television productions.

In the end, I will reflect on how research can make a difference when it comes to green screen and green shooting; How we can deal with the climate unconscious and banal Anthropocene in television (Leida 2021), and in what ways we as television scholars can work in interdisciplinary, creative, and critical ways to engage in climate conditions (Bengesser & Waade 2021; Weissmann 2024).

**Anne Marit Waade** is professor and Head of Department of Media Studies and Journalism at Aarhus University in Denmark. She has published widely, amongst others on Location and Locality, Screen Tourism, Nordic Noir and Crime Drama. She is currently heading a research project on Cultural Transformations that examines the role of the media in larger socio-political changes.

# Programme Details

**Monday, 24 June 2024, 2pm**

## Television, Climate Change and Knowledge

Melissa Beattie (independent scholar)

### **A Forecast You Can Trust?: Local News Meteorologists and Climate Change**

Anthropogenic climate change is happening. This is an overwhelmingly accepted fact, with greater than 99% of scientists in agreement (Lynas et al, 2021). Yet responses to climate change science vary amongst both local news meteorologists in the US and their audiences, with some well-known meteorologists with large social media followings like Alabama's James Spann being climate change sceptics (Bagley, 2012). In this paper I will give an overview of the presumed parasocial relationships between local news meteorologists and their audiences (Henson, 2010), discuss how that relationship can be problematised (Beattie, 2023) and engage in a case study of Chris Gloniger, formerly the chief meteorologist of KCCI in (majority-conservative) Des Moines, Iowa, who was sent death threats by a viewer over his support of climate change science (Milman, 2023). Through a virtual ethnography focusing upon a qualitative discursive analysis of comments on the KCCI YouTube channel of representative recordings of Gloniger's work involving climate change, this paper will analyse the discourses surrounding climate change and its denial, the place of the local news meteorologist in climate change education and surrounding the specific case of the threats to Gloniger.

#### Select Bibliography

Bagley K (2012). Why don't TV meteorologists believe in climate change? Inside Climate News (7 May). Available from <https://insideclimatenews.org/news/07052012/television-meteorologists-climate-change-skeptics-weather-global-warming-john-coleman-james-span-joseph-daleo/> (accessed 8/12/23).

Beattie M A (2023) 'In it for the money, not the science'? Problems and potentials of stormchasing media, *Journal of Applied Journalism & Media Studies*, online first, [https://doi.org/10.1386/ajms\\_00104\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1386/ajms_00104_1)

Henson R (2010). *Weather on the Air: A History of Broadcast Meteorology*. Boston, MA: American Meteorological Institute.

Lynas M et al (2021) Greater than 99% consensus on human caused climate change in the peer-reviewed scientific literature. *Environmental Research Letters* 16(114005): 1-7.

Milman O (2023) 'Your heart races a bit': US weather man threatened with death for mentioning climate crisis. *The Guardian* (16 July). Available from <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2023/jul/16/chris-gloniger-tv-weather-man->





Considering that public television still manages to intercept a substantial part of the Italian public, the paper aims first to analyze its ability to mediate between discourses provided by different sources and reconstruct the meaning of scientific knowledge, institutional choices and individual practices. Secondly, by analyzing the latest Rai content focused on climate change and examining the *Prix* case, including the activities, stakeholders, and presented projects, this paper aims to examine the tangible steps taken and, more broadly, the educational role played by Rai in stimulating processes of social learning and raising awareness of environmental issues.

Evdokia Stefanopoulou (Aristotle University of Thessaloniki)

### ***Extrapolations* (Apple TV+, 2023) and Climate Change.**

The cultural pervasiveness of climate change shapes contemporary film and television even in an implicit way, echoing Anthropocene anxieties. A more explicit engagement with anthropogenic climate change is evident in *Extrapolations* (Apple TV+, 2023), an anthology series of interconnected stories that portray a future world ravaged by ecological catastrophes and extreme weather conditions. In this future Earth, a world-leading company called Alpha creates technologies that offer temporary solutions, while contributing to further environmental destruction from which it profits. The stories that unfold in this not-so-distant future span many decades and focus on different aspects of global warming, illustrating the various political, social, economic, and environmental effects of climate change: poverty, lack of resources, deterioration of public health, growing inequality and species extinctions among others. In this way, the show extrapolates from our current situation, imagining a “what if” scenario where governments around the world disregard the United Nations’ 17 Sustainable Development Goals, which point to how issues such as health, education, inequality, and climate change are inextricably linked. The series can be situated in the broader *cli-fi* category; however, in opposition to the majority of such texts where the effects of climate change are irreversible, creating a radically changed world (e.g. *The Last of Us* (HBO, 2023-), *Snowpiercer* (Netflix 2020-2024), *Mad Max: Fury Road* (2015), etc.), *Extrapolations* is set—in the words of the show’s creator Scott Z. Burns, in the “messy middle” (Freedman 2023). That is, the show unfolds in the near future when humans still have some agency to shift course on greenhouse gas emissions. Scott Z. Burns—known for producing the impactful 2006 climate-change documentary *An Inconvenient Truth* and writing the prophetic *Contagion* (2011)—stated that the main influence for *Extrapolations* was Amitav Gosh's 2016 book *The Great Derangement. Climate Change and the Unthinkable* (Freedman 2023). In this book, Gosh argues that the majority of ‘serious’ artistic and literary production of our time has been unable to address climate change properly and urges contemporary cultural production to take seriously the reality of our times. *Extrapolations* is indeed a response to Gosh’s call, bringing to the foreground climate change. Drawing on Gosh’s arguments, the present paper argues that in opposition to the majority of films and television series where climate change remains in the background, serving as the text’s “Anthropocene unconscious” (Bould 2023), in *Extrapolations* anthropogenic climate catastrophe takes centre stage. This is achieved with the show’s aesthetic traits which combine elements from the

environmental documentary with dystopian features, to illustrate a not-so-distant world to which contemporary audiences can relate with their own reality. Despite the show's simplistic ending and other flaws that disregard the complexities in preventing climate catastrophe, I argue that *Extrapolations* presents one of the rare instances in television fiction where climate change is negotiated straightforwardly, thus attempting to seriously think (to paraphrase Gosh) the entanglement of the human with the non-human world and the "forces of unthinkable magnitude" (Ghosh 2016, 63) surrounding climate change.

### Preliminary Bibliography

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**Tuesday, 25 June 2024, 9am**

## Sustainability as Representation

Blythe Stevenson Worthy (The University of Sydney)

### **Sustainable Pedagogy in Mira Nair's Television**

Despite the process of deregulation and privatization of national broadcasting rights and intensification of global digital communicative technologies, many television theorists persist in arguing that television is still overwhelmingly defined via national lines (Geraghty, 2024). For these theorists, television has always played a crucial role in publicising "a nation's private life" (Ellis, 1995, 5) and remains an influential cultural ambassador. The pedagogical politics offered by television as correctives to misconceptions of a country's citizens have long sustained the work of Indian practitioner Mira Nair. While her more famous feature films also revel in this "cross-cultural social acumen" (Muir, 2006, 9), it is Nair's overlooked television work that more comprehensively applies the role of television for educational purposes to a transnational setting. Highlighting quotidian Indian life to develop criticisms of the structural roots of postcolonial crises and hegemonic discourses of white supremacy in

international feminism, Nair's television is made in English, or in Hindi with English dubbing and subtitles for a foreign audience. Nair's early television, including teledocs *India Cabaret* (1985) and *Children of a Desired Sex* (1987) investigate the lives of go-go dancers deemed as untouchable in public Indian society, and women who are forced to abort their female foetuses. Providing a stark vision of the private life of Indian women for US television networks, Nair's teledocs confirm what Chandra Mohanty has determined as the internationalisation of the gendered division of labour (Mohanty, 1988, 76). The Indian subjects of these works are shown by Nair to exist so deeply in the unsustainable "pores of capitalism" that they are inaccessible via the capitalist dynamics that normally allow for channels of cross-cultural communication (Spivak, 2006, 186). In Nair's 1998 telefilm *My Own Country* (Showtime Networks), for example, an Indian emigre and infectious disease specialist finds himself and his family ostracised with "AIDs-by-association" in mid-80s southern Tennessee, the Indian diaspora enmeshed with AIDs-era paranoia. Recovering these overlooked television works from history, this presentation analyses the sustainable pedagogy in Nair's works for television, located within the productive area of transnational Indigenous feminism. Using a historically grounded and geographically contextualized critical aesthetic approach, an analysis of the conditions that facilitated Nair's television work in the 1980s and 1990s are shown to result from the inevitably contradictory intersection of intellectual developmentalist projects proffered by sustainable economics within the television industry.

Ellie Power (University of Gothenburg)

### **Cruel Optimism and Crisis in the Television Series *The Curse* (2023)**

This paper presentation examines the television series *The Curse* (2023) and how the series functions as a reflection on the role of housing developments, influencer culture and television production in climate change, sustainability and gentrification. Using the concept of cruel optimism from Lauren Berlant (2011), I will explore how the series demonstrates characters whose objects of desire are obstacles to their flourishing, in a series that collapses conventional genres.

In the ten episode comedy drama television series *The Curse*, self-titled "Green Queen", Whitney (Emma Stone) and her new husband Asher (Nathan Fielder), are "flipanthropists" developing properties and businesses in the city of Española, New Mexico. While claiming to improve the area by building sustainable passive homes, the series follows how the couple use greenwashing to hide their acceleration of the gentrification of the local area and their connection to Whitney's "slum lord" parents. This is all exploited by television producer, Dougie (Benny Safdie) whose manipulative skills in interviews and in the editing room, removes and trivialises attempts by the show to raise awareness about the climate crisis, instead favouring the reality TV drama of Whitney and Asher's personal lives. For all three of the main characters, their desire to be loved, to do good, to be admired, emerge as sites of cruel optimism, blocking them from ever reaching these goals and reproducing damaging neoliberal structures rather than creating the alternative ways of living they desire.

While, as Berlant states “Genres provide an affective expectation of the experience of watching something unfold” (2011, 6), *The Curse* acts as one of the emerging aesthetic forms described by Berlant, with waning genre; the show engages in and defies the genre conventions of realism and absurdism, drama, comedy, and reality tv and the show within a show format. Rather than creating expectations for the audience, this creates a sense of disorientation and anxiety, narrating the permanent crisis of the various topics the show highlights. This anxiety is highlighted in the cinematography and mise-en-scène, with uncomfortable framing of the protagonists through windows, and the settings of the newbuild homes designed by Whitney—modernist takes on pueblo style buildings, covered with mirrored surfaces. These houses, both the site of the gentrification and colonisation, also highlight false ideas of sustainability, with their mirrored surfaces killing local wildlife. The houses also function as distorting fun house mirrors refracting and warping the faces of the series characters, disrupting continuity. While the curse of the title may be the literal curse placed on Asher, it may also be the curse of cruel optimism, the dream of a good life, that is always moving further away, both for the series’ main characters and the residents whose lives are made more precarious.

David Levente Palatinus (Technical University of Liberec / University of Trnava)

### **Climate-Conflict-Migration: A TV Studies Perspective**

This paper wishes to tackle the interrelation of climate, conflict and migration, and the ways their pertaining ecological, political, and ethical complexities are construed and circulated via various cultural practices and ways of symbolization that television as a dominant mode of storytelling uses. Forms of conflict, and in their wake, migration have become key players in the recent radicalization of global politics and have frequently been construed in political discourses as threats to national security and to the perceived cultural values in Western societies. From Huntington’s highly controversial *Clash of Civilizations* (1996) to Derrida’s concept of ‘hostipitality’ (2000) to Žižek’s ideas about the militarization of society (2015) to Thomas Nail’s *Theory of the Border* (2016), conflict and migration have been mobilized as political capital as well as new critical idioms that thematize discourses on how we understand human subjectivity, and the ways we negotiate historical and cultural legacies of territory, identity, safety, economic interests and democratic liberties. The recent emergence of populist agendas also necessitates a radical rethinking of issues ranging from politics of inclusion to social mobility to climate justice and violent borders. On the other hand, a growing body of scholarship (see for instance Abel et al., 2019) suggests a correlation between climate change, violent conflicts and forced migration. Research on global security, exacerbated by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic over the past year, established itself as one of the pivotal agendas to pursue in relation to the question of sustainability.

Therefore, this paper attempts to bridge the gap between current political discourses and the ways in which television responds to the emerging anxieties around the construction and circulation of cultural ideas about the multi-faceted relations

between conflict, climate, and migration. It looks at the ways in which symbolic representations render the subjective dimensions of conflict, from heroism and sacrifice to devastation, victimization and suffering, and, conversely, the ways in which screen narratives are also weaponized and will have produced paradoxical responses among audiences in different geographic contexts. How television (and media) scholarship critically assess the impact of screen narratives on the dynamics of climate, conflict and migration? How can audiences harness the potential of television for peace-making and reconciliation? How can showrunners ensure the ethical and responsible use of screen media in situations of conflict? How 'sustainable' are the cultural ideas that such fictional representations circulate? This complex and dynamic media landscape poses new challenges and opportunities for negotiating the causes, consequences and responses to contemporary conflicts, as well as the roles and responsibilities of different actors involved in them.

**Tuesday, 25 June 2024, 12.30pm**

## Equality and Diversity in Representation

Mareike Jenner (Anglia Ruskin University)

### **Middlebrow Streaming? Netflix, Representation, and Visibility Politics**

This paper explores Netflix' turn towards the middlebrow and links this to changes in representational politics and the orientation towards the transnational. For Netflix, the success of *Orange is the New Black*, back in 2013, proved to be programmatic in the way "otherness" was depicted. The series put an emphasis on narrativizing barriers to social advancement: the series showed how Black, Brown, queer, trans, poor and disabled women ended up in prison and how the legal system understood them. This strategy changed, however, with Netflix output growing, and increasingly trying to address a transnational mass audience.

This paper uses the work of Kristen J. Warner on colourblind casting (2015) and what she calls 'plastic representation' (2017) and that of Sarah Banet-Weiser on 'popular feminism' to conceptualise Netflix' recent representation of race, gender (including LGBTQIA+), or ability as visibility politics. Visibility politics is the process of depicting groups that are socially disadvantaged without also explaining why they are disadvantaged or suggesting solutions. Changes often remain semiotic, and thereby focussed on the most visible of characteristics (skin colour, gender, visible disability). While this practice is common for American network television, it has also proven useful for Netflix' strategy to offer a transnational television. One of the problems Netflix faces is that the narrativizing of barriers is often difficult to translate to different cultural contexts: histories of slavery and racism differ for the many countries where Netflix is available; Healthcare access and access to specific treatments, as well as provisions states make to allow social participation for disabled people, looks different around the globe; Gender is conceptualised in different ways, and these are only a few points where differences are obvious. Thus, the narrativizing of barriers becomes an exercise in nationalism. Transnational TV, however, is often somewhat vague about the

ways discrimination looks. Visibility politics is, thus, well suited to it. Or, at least, it is dominant in the way Netflix formulates its transnational appeal.

This paper discusses visibility politics as a strategy for transnational streaming for Netflix. This is decidedly different from Netflix' strategy in its early years. For this paper, I will look at an earlier example of Netflix series and representation, specifically focussing on Latina representation with *One Day at a Time*, comparing it to a more contemporary series focussing on a Latinx family, *Wednesday*.

### Bibliography

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Maria Piqueras Perez (University of Murcia)

### **The 1980s Black Film and Video Workshops Ceddo, Black Audio Film Collective and Sankofa highlighting the Importance of Television.**

In the 1980s, Ceddo, Black Audio Film Collective, and Sankofa were three London based film and video workshops that countered stereotypes about black Britishness through their experimental productions. Their works are characterised by the intersection of race, sexuality, and gender against the social and political background of Thatcherism. Therefore, discrimination at various levels can be investigated through their works. Their collective practice and the language they created left a consciousness-raising legacy for future generations of filmmakers who followed their path of subversion using cinema as a weapon. Their productions were mostly financed and transmitted by Channel 4. As such, they are an example of the role of television is both catering diversity and giving voice to the voiceless. Their productions show that cinema and TV can be tools of inspiration, education, remediation of stereotypes and creation leading to a more inclusive and equal society.

This proposal focuses on the change in narrative that these collectives brought to the UK thanks to the appearance of Channel 4. Channel 4 founding of independent black films and its transmission on TV included new images about the black British experience away from misconceptions and essentialist representations. This aim will be achieved by exploring how the topics of some of their productions gave an answer to a society that was in crisis fostering education on matters related to minorities and managing at the same time to encapsulate the road towards equality in race-relations. In fact, training and education was part of the agenda of these collectives. This paper will start by exploring the origins of the film collectives and the context that gave rise to them. After this, I will show how their productions respond to the goal of television and

education as well as diversity. Finally, this paper will demonstrate how television is a tool that can address current issues with examples already set up in the past.

**Wednesday, 26 June 2024, 9am**

## The Industry and Climate Change

Hilary Weston Jones (Birmingham City University)

### **The New Health and Safety: Sustainability and BBC Television Production**

To create exciting and challenging content, television relies heavily on some of the most carbon polluting industries on the planet – transport, energy and disposal (Sørensen and Noonan, 2022). The constant thirst for spectacle in an increasingly competitive media environment also has an impact. You can't make *Blue Planet* without mass movement of people, and viewers don't want to see the same glittery costumes used repeatedly on *Strictly Come Dancing*. As such industry practice has historically normalised the use of disposable materials and mass relocation of cast and crew for periods of production.

The BBC's Environmental statement (2023) states its ambition to continue to deliver "world class" content, whilst "doing everything" it can do to reduce their environmental impact. Given that one hour of UK-based factual television equates to the same carbon footprint as the yearly energy use of three semi-detached houses, how is the BBC "doing everything" it can to lower its carbon footprint, whilst achieving its editorial and creative ambitions? This paper will explore the way that UN sustainability goal 12 is being addressed through changes to television production in the UK.

Since 2009, the BBC has worked on developing an accurate method of measuring its carbon footprint. Since 2013, BAFTA have led the debate around inventive ways of breaking away from traditional production methods and embedding new sustainable ways of working. Widely used actions now include the introduction of no-fly orders, use of greener generators to power equipment, paperless productions and new businesses specialising in recycling sets, props and costumes. The use and training of local crews helps avoid large scale relocation of production teams, whilst also helping grow local economies. However, production still faces huge challenges ranging including financial, technical and behavioural considerations.

Television production is a complex, time-consuming and people heavy process which relies on a combination of traditional practices and emerging technologies. As with the prolonged introduction of health and safety regulations from the 1970s, there has been much reluctance to change production methods in order to address climate change. BAFTA Ambassadors talk about how time-consuming it is to conceive more sustainable ways of working and how change has to come from the top. In line with the introduction of health and safety monitoring, budgets have been at the forefront of every Production Manager's mind. Rising energy costs, the threat to the BBC's licence fee and competition from commercial services likes of Netflix and Amazon have all had a negative impact on programme funding.



This paper will draw on qualitative testimony from senior figures within BBC production for both Sport and Natural History programming in order to explore current examples of best practice and examine how sustainability is becoming embedded in production from inception to transmission.

#### References:

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Editorial - Editorial (wearealbert.org)

Alexa Scarlata and Ramon Lobato (RMIT University)

### **Software obsolescence in smart TVs: implications for device lifespan and disposal**

Smart TVs – internet-connected, app-enabled TVs – have been enthusiastically embraced by consumers in recent years. In Australia, for example, the number of adults using smart TVs at home has more than doubled since 2017, rising from 36% to 73% of the population (ACMA 2023). Meanwhile, "dumb" TVs are disappearing from electronics retail stores. Smart TVs and other interactive television devices have often been discussed through a lens of consumer empowerment and expanded choice. However, an issue of growing policy concern is their environmental impact.

This paper explores a specific aspect of the wider sustainability problem around smart TVs: software obsolescence. Software obsolescence refers to the unnecessarily short lifespan of smart TV operating systems and apps that fuel our current culture of device replacement. While we expected older-model dumb TVs to last for a decade or more, many smart TVs are sunsetted after just a few years – meaning they no longer receive software updates and become slow, buggy, dysfunctional, or inoperable. LG and Samsung, the world's top two TV manufacturers, guarantee to deliver software updates to their smart TVs for only two and three years respectively after purchase, or for slightly longer in the case of critical software updates (Which 2023). One unfortunate implication of this built-in obsolescence is that users must either replace their smart TV after a few years or alternatively purchase an add-on device such as a Chromecast or FireTV to extend the life of their hardware. Both options involve environmental and consumer costs – costs that could be avoided if smart TV operating systems and apps were designed with longevity, rather than planned obsolescence, in mind.

Since 2019 we have been researching smart TV adoption in Australia to understand the diverse "incorporation" (Silverstone 1994) of smart TVs into households. We have considered the lifecycle of the smart TV, from manufacturing to disposal, and how this is shaped by cultural factors including consumer views about app availability, content discoverability, and ease of use. Drawing on a combination of industrial analysis, device testing, smart TV user and retailer surveys, and a collaboration with the Australian

consumer group Choice, this paper reflects on how the perceived lifespan of the smart TV is reshaping our relationship to the TV as a domestic media device.

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Mary-Joy van der Deure (Utrecht University)

### **Preservation for the future: Shining an eco-critical light on digital television preservation**

In the past two decades, many European televisual archives have partially digitised their collections. With analogue carriers being at risk of decay and requiring physical presence in the archive, digitisation makes these collections more sustainable and accessible for the future (c.f. Images for the Future 2007-2014). Digital, however, does not mean immaterial and increased attention has been given to the environmental impact of digital storage (e.g. Cubitt 2021; Marks 2020; Obringer et al. 2021). Safeguarding these collections potentially contributes to a more environmentally sustainable television industry, as the archive itself serves as a repository for reuse which decreases the need for new productions. However, to maximise this potential, it is of utmost importance to understand how current digital preservation policies contribute to the emergent climate crisis.

In order to understand this impact, this paper will first address the materiality that underlies digital heritage preservation. In line with the work by Linda Tadic (2022), this means focussing on the carriers that store the digital collections. This includes paying attention to the minerals and other raw materials these carriers require, and the often destructive mining industries involved in excavating them from the earth (cf. Starosielski and Walker 2016; Parikka 2012). Additionally, this materiality is present in the process of powering and cooling this hardware, requiring energy and resulting in emissions of greenhouse gases, as well as in the destruction of these carriers, resulting in increasing issues of e-waste and the unfair global distribution of this toxic material (Parikka 2016).

With an understanding of this materiality, this paper will thereafter elaborate upon a policy analysis carried out at the Netherlands Institute for Sound and Vision, frontrunner in the field due to their key position in the digitisation project Images for the Future. To understand if and how this archive approaches the issue of environmental sustainability, their policy documents have been analysed according to three key areas

as set out by Pendergrass et al. (2019). This paper will first address archival appraisal, meaning all actions involved in selecting what does and what does not need to be archived. It will thereafter discuss the policy in place regarding permanence, meaning all actions taken to guarantee the durability of the collections. Lastly, this paper will elaborate upon the availability of the collections in the archive. This will include all actions and infrastructure in place to guarantee the accessibility of this heritage for research, media professionals and the general public, and will additionally include the more recent environmental challenges brought on by AI implementation. Together, this paper will provide insight into the environmental impact of digital television presentation, and highlight areas that must first be addressed before the archive's environmentally sustainable potential can be utilised.

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**Wednesday, 26 June 2024, 3pm**

## Representing Climate Change: An Industry Perspective

Jess Moore (Glasgow Caledonian University)

"The writing and development of SDG-related TV shows."

I am a PhD candidate at Glasgow Caledonian University and a working scriptwriter and director. My PhD considers scriptwriting techniques and screen drama related to the themes of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals with a focus on SDG 5, Gender Equality and SDG 13, Climate Action (more information below). While completing my PhD, I also have several TV and film scripts in development, and I am actively working towards getting several film and television projects into production. I would like to present my findings to date on the TV case studies I am examining, and the development of my own SDG-related TV scripts, and the journey to commissioning and production.

Using an Arts-Based Research (ABR) approach and a qualitative methodology, my PhD explores how scriptwriters can incorporate the themes of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into screen drama with a particular focus on SDG 5, (Gender Equality) and SDG 13 (Climate Action). The significant size, influence, and global scale of the Creative Industries means there is potential for them to contribute not only to SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) and SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure), but also to achievement of the themes of the other 15 SDGs. My PhD focuses specifically on-screen drama, which makes up a significant proportion of television revenues and consumer screen time. I am using elite interviews, case studies of TV programmes and films, and a self-reflexive analysis of my own creative process and journey to commissioning and production.

The contemporary case studies I am considering include *After the Flood*, *Schitt's Creek*, *Mr Bates vs The Post Office*, *Grey's Anatomy*, *Don't Look Up*, *The End Where We Start From*, *Geostrom*, *Delhi Crime*, *Extrapolations* and a number of others. I am conducting elite interviews with writers, directors, show runners and producers. The output of my PhD will be a script, NO MAN'S LAND, which was written as part of HOT HOUSE, Climate Spring's BBC Writers and BFI-backed climate change script development lab, and, additionally, a show bible and academic commentary.

Bent-Jorgen Perlmutter (Princeton University and Glasgow Caledonian University)

### **Disarming Empathy in a Climate-Based Television Series**

My paper will explore how scholarship on empathy, contextualized within the framework of the United Nations' climate action goal (SDG13), can contribute to the development of a scripted television series. It aims to critique the use of empathy in dramatic storytelling and consider potential alternative models that effectively help communicate the UN's climate action goal. To the best of my knowledge, no academic paper has ever examined the efficacy of empathy in climate-themed TV scriptwriting. Eliciting an audience's empathy has generally been considered one of the main goals of

narrative persuasion, yet several prominent writers and scholars have been vocal critics of empathy and its ability to activate change. Empathy seems particularly unhelpful when used in TV series grappling with the suffering caused by climate change. Most recent climate-based TV series tend to focus on disaster scenarios and dystopian futures. By sharing climate victims' overwhelming experience of pain and suffering, audience members tend to experience "empathic distress" (Singer & Klimecki, 2014 p. R875), which refers to an aversive response to the suffering of others and can lead to exhaustion and burnout. It also makes audience members feel like little to nothing can be done to combat climate change and can cause them to withdraw from their experience with the subject matter to protect themselves from excessive negative feelings. In other words, the more empathic distress we experience from climate-based TV series, the less likely we can respond or change our behavior towards acting on climate change.

I therefore want to investigate and propose alternative models that aim to influence audiences to respond with less empathic distress and more compassion to act against climate change. In doing so, my inquiry will question whether empathy is enough to inspire action against climate change, or does it let audiences off the hook or even paralyze them? Instead, should TV writers strive to replace their aim of increasing their audience's empathy with something more effective like increasing their audience's compassion? And if so, how can a TV series best use compassion to inspire action? To explore these questions, I will conduct an extensive literature review followed by qualitative, semi-formal interviews with the leaders of climate story-focused organizations including Good Energy, the NRDC's "Rewrite the Future" campaign, RARE, albert, and the UN's "Entertainment and Culture for Climate Action" (ECCA) Assembly who all are coming up with alternatives to the gloom and doom paradigm surrounding climate change in film and TV. I will also research concepts beyond the realm of TV series (both climate-based and not) that eschew empathy such as rational compassion, representative thinking, Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekt* ("distancing effect"), effective altruism, and longtermism. All these sources will help me craft a compelling model for other writers, filmmakers, commissioners, activists, academics, and institutions interested in creating a climate-based TV series that harnesses and/or transforms empathy into compassionate agency.

Zoe Fuad (Brown University, New York)

### **Animated Visions: Rewiring Onto-Epistemology for Climate Action through Television**

This paper explores how animated television can reshape our onto-epistemological understanding of the world, particularly in the context of the climate crisis, and offers an innovative exploration of how animated mediums can contribute to addressing the United Nations' SDG 13: Climate Action. Drawing from new materialist scholars like Karen Barad (2007) and Indigenous thinkers such as Vanessa Watts (2013), Zoe Todd (2016), and Topa and Narvaez (2022), I argue that our current environmental predicament stems from Cartesian dualisms. These dualisms separate humans, non-humans, and inanimate objects, fostering extractive and exploitative practices. I focus

on the animated series *Scavengers Reign* (2023) as a case study. This mainstream Western TV show not only reflects the political ideologies of its era but also showcases the transformative potential of animation in visual media. Through a close reading of the show's visual techniques — specifically its use of 'animetism' and 'cinematism' (Lamarre, 2009) — I illustrate how *Scavengers Reign* employs Eastern animistic storytelling styles. Animetism, employed in *Scavengers Reign*, uses camera techniques and open compositing to emphasize the audience's separation from nature. This approach contrasts sharply with the 'cinematism' prevalent in most Western television, which immerses viewers through closed compositing and bullet-eye viewpoints; it draws upon the unique tools offered by animation, positioning the audience as co-inhabitants rather than dominators of the animated ecosystem, challenging Western televisual norms of control and domination (Virilio, 1989).

Further, the show's use of long takes and wide shots induces a sense of awe in viewers. This cinematic choice counteracts anxiety-driven responses, reorienting viewers towards a relational mode of seeing that is crucial for addressing the climate crisis. Here, the neurobiological impact of reshaping vision becomes a pivotal element, as proposed by Narvaez and Topa (2009). Additionally, *Scavengers Reign* subverts traditional narrative structures through its non-human-centric plot and 'puzzle box' storytelling (White, 2023). This method diverges from linear, anthropocentric narratives, encouraging viewers to understand and integrate into natural systems rather than dominating them.

Finally, I assess the show's critical reception, examining how well it succeeds in imparting new ways of interacting with the world. Reviews from sources like IGN and *The New York Times* reflect a resonance with feminist and Indigenous perspectives, highlighting the show's capacity to teach viewers to engage more harmoniously with ecological systems. This analysis contributes to a broader understanding of how media, particularly animated television, can play a crucial role in redefining our relationship with the natural world and addressing the climate crisis through innovative onto-epistemological frameworks. Rather than one-time solutions or short-term goals, this method of visual mediation and worldview rewiring pushes an audience to change the very way they inhabit the world around them: from small decisions to the big. This reorientation is pivotal to addressing our mounting climate change crisis.

**Thursday, 27 June 2024, 1pm**

## Roundtable: Issues of Health and wellbeing in television & the role of television in education.

Lauren Beck (Monash University)

The global proliferation of reality TV production in recent years has brought to light numerous ethical concerns with the way in which the participants of these shows are treated. These concerns include the use of deceptive editing techniques, misrepresentation, and the exploitation of vulnerable participants. Some of the risks resulting from such treatment were highlighted following a British parliamentary inquiry into the ethics of producing reality TV in 2019, after the suicide of 38 reality TV

participants globally, many of whom were involved in UK-based productions. The inquiry examined the ‘duty of care’ provided by production companies with regards to the psychological safety of participants during and after production, the meaning of informed consent, fair representation and participants' rights as ‘workers’.

Despite efforts to improve standards since this inquiry, instances of misrepresentation and exploitation continue to emerge, highlighting the need for further exploration and intervention. These instances of misrepresentation and exploitation don't only damage the participants of factual content, they also have the potential to impact audiences who are influenced by the content they consume. The idea of ‘invisible learning’ from film and TV is particularly problematic where marginalised communities are involved. If the few instances of media representation for marginalised groups are plagued with misrepresentation, it threatens not only the health and wellbeing of the misrepresented participants, but the wider community who are building a false world view. As a working television producer, I have seen first-hand the conflict between ethics and economics when it comes to Participant treatment and production methods. For this reason I am highly motivated to find practical steps to improve industry practise. One proposed solution to the problem of participant misrepresentation, is to facilitate greater participant agency during the production process. In addressing these issues, this roundtable will discuss the following ideas: Are there instances of participant agency in reality tv production currently? What might these instances look like? What economic, social and political limitations influence participant agency in current production models? What steps could be taken to improve participant agency either legislatively, through social pressure, or otherwise?

**Friday, 28 June 2024, 1pm**

## The Politics of/and Representation

Will Stanford Abbiss (independent scholar)

### **“It’ll be easier for everyone with me gone”: The Resurgence of Inequality (and Commercialism) in *The Crown***

In its final two seasons, *The Crown* (Netflix, 2016-23) moves away from the post-heritage ideologies I have previously identified in the series (Abbiss, 2023; 2024). The British sociopolitical context, now represented by Prime Ministers John Major (Jonny Lee Miller) and Tony Blair (Bertie Carvel), is minimally explored compared to previous seasons, while even Queen Elizabeth (Imelda Staunton) is frequently marginalised in favour of a protracted telling of Princess Diana’s (Elizabeth Debicki) final weeks.

Perhaps even more troublingly, a matter at the heart of contemporary discourse around the British family, the allegations that Prince Andrew was the perpetrator of sexual abuse in 2001, is ignored by *The Crown*, in stark contrast with its ambiguous treatment of Prince Philip in its early seasons. Screenwriter Peter Morgan’s revisiting of his film *The Queen* (2006), one of the original inspirations for *The Crown*, ultimately presents a narrower and more individualistic interpretation than the film and television seasons that precede *The Crown*’s depiction of the 1990s and 2000s. While previous seasons,

notwithstanding their focus on the monarchy, aimed to show the breadth of British society, the final seasons expose a predilection for the privileged class, ending the drama on a note of inequality.

This paper identifies the ideological shift in *The Crown's* concluding years, situating this alongside developments in Netflix's commercial strategies. As Netflix and other leading streaming services implement ad-supported tiers within their services, a development scholars are beginning to grapple with (Lotz and Eklund, 2024), they are becoming 'multi-sided platforms' in a manner previously considered exclusive to AVoD services (Chalaby, 2023). As the boundaries between categories of streaming services become porous, the capacity for pioneering SVoDs to maintain complex drama productions has come under threat. This aligns with the recent words of *The Sopranos* (HBO, 1999-2007) creator David Chase, who told *The Times* that risk aversity is now once again pervading the television industry. As one of Netflix's earliest commissioned dramas, and unusual by spanning the service's eras of distinction and commercialism, *The Crown's* conclusion is an illuminating example through which to explore the present moment of multinational streaming television, and the storytelling possibilities that may be becoming more remote.

Glòria Salvadó-Corretger and Fran Benavente (Pompeu Fabra University)

**Slow clones in television fiction to reflect on urgent contemporary challenges: the revealing role of Dougie Jones (*Twin Peaks: The Return*, David Lynch, 2017) and Commandant Van der Weyden (*P'tit Quinquin*, Bruno Dumont, ARTE, 2014, 2018)**

In this paper, we examine the figure of the "slow clone", or the "idiot double", through the series *P'tit Quinquin* (Bruno Dumont, ARTE, 2014, 2018) and *Twin Peaks: The Return* (David Lynch, Showtime, 2017). The slow clone is a character that functions in a similar way in both series. He subtly reveals (from the limits of the human condition, as defined by María Zambrano) the darkest and most chaotic parts of his moment in time, that is, Le Pen's racist France and Trump's America; and brings out local evil (evil associated with a geographic area), domestic evil and abstract evil. The slow clone, as previously alluded to, draws upon the idiot figure, which has a long tradition in literature and film. The idiot and chaos go hand in hand (Desbarats, 2015), that is why it will be essential to analyze the idiot double in the television works of Lynch and Dumont through five central ideas:

- the idea that they move and think in a very slow manner, which is the starting point for all misunderstandings they provoke and a way of bringing out all urgent problems contemporary world has.
- the idea of the defective double and the relevance of the act of birth (Zambrano, 2019).
- The importance of the body, slow gestures and slapstick, and its genealogical relationship with burlesque characters, such as Langdon, Keaton, Tati or Lewis.



- The archetype of the idiot as a narrative figure, who disrupts the structure of any story, in a way that disturbs and dislocates serial fiction conventions and opens a space for reflection on contemporary problems.

- The idiot as a figure in limbo, or a dispossessed character without memory, who comes from “out there”, and has lost the capacity to speak, but accepts having a double as normal.

He finds himself in constant (slow) movement despite lacking a destination, causing revelation with no intention of doing so and appearing not to notice his surroundings but shows acute awareness (Zambrano, 2019). Both the idiot double in *P'tit Quinquin* and in *Twin Peaks. The Return*, as duplicated characters, facilitate repetition, which is a key device in serial fiction. They generate stories that restart continuously. They live in worlds that are ruptured, nonsensical, grotesque and lost, but striving to make sense. The idiot finds a perfect space for his existence in this environment. As we see in these two series, the idiot double functions as an “envoy” (Zambrano, 2019) who finds himself outside of space and time, as he inhabits an open and available non-time (Maillard, 2019). Furthermore, he resides within the confines of the word (he doesn't talk) and of the story (he is unaware of the world in which he lives) (Pardo, 2019). However, he has the power of sight. These two series also have this capacity: they see beyond their plots. As said by Rosset (2019), the idiot has the ability to approach the real and in these television shows, through the slow clone, we very crudely discover the contemporary world.

Sónia de Sá (University of Beira Interior)

### **Television fiction in Portugal and the subtlety of neo-colonialist discourses**

The representation of women in Portuguese fiction from the colonial period, almost 50 years after the revolution of 25 April 1974, which put an end to more than half a century of dictatorship and colonialist wars in various African countries, maintains, through subtle neo-colonialist discourses, the limiting traits of white women's privilege over black women (colonised) and absolute submission to white men (colonisers) and fearful domination over black men (colonised). In a contemporary reading of Portuguese colonialist history, this paper analyses the figure of the white Portuguese woman based on two television fictions: *Três Mulheres* (Alvarães, Garcia & Ventrell, 2018-2022) and *Glória* (Lopes, 2021). The research techniques applied are film and discourse analyses. The first conclusions show that a) the narratives indicate a neo-colonialist continuum of superiority of white people over black people; b) the representation of white women is, in public, as housewives or creators who pave the way to freedom, and, in private, as submissive-victims of the white male figure; and c) the fictionalised constructs in audiovisual format tend to show new ways of silencing the colonising past through the victimisation of white women and the silencing of black women.

**Friday, 28 June 2024, 4pm**

## Screening Discussion

Sarah Lahm

Mental Health in Unliveable Times: Screening of *Undone*

*Undone* (Amazon Prime Video, 2019-2022), a women-centric half-hour drama, uses rotoscoping animation and Science Fiction tropes to articulate its protagonist Alma's newfound ability to manipulate time after a car accident. This screening of *Undone*'s first two episodes aims to spark a discussion about the ways in which the rotoscoping and spatio-temporal structure of *Undone* work to articulate its main character's experiences as an individual living through precarious times. The relationship between Alma's mental health and her environment—a contemporary neoliberal, late-capitalist US American landscape—is set up in the show's first episode. Set close to the border between the US and Mexico in San Antonio, Texas, *Undone* raises questions about our reality's sustainability for the wellbeing of individuals through its plot and character trajectories. In its second episode, the programme's rotoscoping animation starts to blur the boundaries between reality and imagination while simultaneously drawing a stark contrast between the protagonist's complicated, difficult reality and the idea of a mindful, healthy connection to nature and her feelings. Questions for discussion could include: How does the rotoscoping animation 'feel' to you? How do you feel about the voiceover (later to be revealed as the start of an intradiegetic dialogue) and the main character's comments on capitalism and mental health in the first episode? How are mental health and wellbeing articulated in these two episodes, and how are they connected to 'nature'?

**Tuesday, 2 July 2024, 1pm**

## Reception of Climate Change Stories

Daniel T. Ezegwu (Glorious Vision University, Ogwa, Edo State, Nigeria), Mercy Ifeyinwa Obichili (Alex Ekwueme Federal University, Ndufu Alike Ikwo, Ebonyi State) and Gloria Eberchukwu Nwodu (Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Anambra, State, Nigeria)

### **Public Perception of Select TV Stations Reportage of Climate Change Issues in Anambra State, Nigeria**

Climate change has led to and continued to generate national, regional, and international discourse for decades. It has not only been at the core of political, social, and economic gatherings, but it has also resulted from numerous summits, conferences, conventions, and declarations with individuals, organisations, and nations lending their voices to the discourse. One such gathering in recent times was

the COP 28 conference held in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, from 30 November to 12 December 2023. Climate change is affecting our planet in different ways. A variation in climate impacts crop growth and human health. Climate change affects ecosystems, livelihoods, and human security as well as low crop yield and food shortage. The mass media, particularly television can as well act as a catalyst in teaching the multitude on climate change. They can also report global warming, the green peace movement, depletion of the ozone layer, the greenhouse gases effect, acid rain, etc. Television can still report the need to show restraint by humans in their use of natural resources. They can also play an essential role in reporting disasters arising from climate change. The mass media especially television medium have the constitutional mandate to monitor the environment to report the happenings to the public. One of the functions of the television is to inform; this information will not happen if the target audience cannot be reached, not just with any message, but the right and accurate message. Television mediums are endowed with the ability to set an agenda for the public to understand certain issues, like those of climate change science, its effects, and the need for its prevention. The study will examine the residents of Anambra State, Nigeria. Anambra State has continued to witness the consequences of climate change, such as flooding, erosion, environmental degradation, pollution, heat waves, damage to marine ecosystems, and improper waste disposal.

The aims of the study are: To find out the extent residents of Anambra State are exposed to TV reports on climate change, to ascertain the perception of Anambra residents on TV reports of climate change, and to find out whether news-related content on climate change has the potential to shape public opinion or influence the societal discourse on the issue. The study will be anchored on social judgement theory. While survey research design will be used to elicit responses from the respondents on the subject matter. The findings will be discussed in line with the research questions. Recommendations will be made from the findings of the study. Key Words: Public, Perception, Television, Reportage, Climate Change

Jelena Krivosic (University of the West of England, Bristol)

### **Is the Natural History genre still able to engage audiences with stories about climate change?**

Today's Natural History documentaries, whether produced for National Geographic, Netflix, Amazon or other broadcasters, all replicate the conventional 'blue-chip' format (Bousé, 2000) pioneered by the BBC in the 1970s and underpinned by the BBC's mission, as a public broadcasting service, to 'inform, educate and entertain' (BBC, 2024). Blue-chip's projection of pristine, spectacular, human-less wildernesses has attracted global audiences in their millions (Jones et al., 2019). In the process, it has helped establish the genre's reputation as an environmental ambassador by demonstrating to international audiences our joint "responsibility" for our "extraordinarily fascinating, extraordinarily valuable" natural world (Sir David Attenborough in: *Wildscreen*, 2000). In December 2017, the BBC's final episode of *Blue Planet II*, 'Our Oceans', epitomised this ambassadorial role and gratified the BBC's ethical mission. By putting the damaging consequences of consumptive human activity on centre stage, the '*Blue Planet II* effect' (Hynes et al., 2021) triggered a widespread

public reaction (Bevan et al., 2020) that put plastic pollution onto media and political agendas (Males and VanAelst, 2021). What followed in the genre was a rise in crises storytelling (Nolan et al., 2022), that openly interweave topics of climate and ecological justice within their narratives, which indicated the beginning of an important shift in subject matter.

In the past, the Natural History genre has faced much academic and industry criticism for being blinkered by its profit-oriented ambition to ‘entertain’ and for not doing more to ‘inform and educate’ audiences about the urgent need to change (Weiss, 2019; Nolan et al., 2022). Globally, as we stand at a tipping point with temperatures anticipated to break the 1.5° c limit (Hansen et al., 2024) and with over 44,000 species sitting on the brink of extinction (IUCN, 2024), this presentation will question whether the Natural History genre is responsibly producing a climate and ecological justice story of change, or if it is ‘amusing audiences to death’ (Postman, 2005). Based on academic literature and primary research, including series analysis and filmmaker interviews, this presentation will explore the ‘shifting production ecology’ (Cottle, 2004) of what has become the Natural History ‘global brand’ (Richards, 2013). This will help question whether the global brand is repeating neo-colonial patterns of its BBC pioneer (Christophers, 2006) by continuing to erase marginalised voices and alternative discourses. This presentation will discuss the reasons behind the increased competition to film the last of the remaining ‘wilderness’, and whether is to increase audiences’ crises awareness or is actually an attempt to attract new audiences and profit in a time of broadcast commissioning drought. It will examine blue-chip’s audio-visual spectacularisation of nature (Wheatley, 2016) and how this technique, when used to frame crises stories, could undermine the genre’s reputation as a science educator by formulating addictive ‘eco-porn’ (D’Amico, 2013). In doing so, it will ask whether landmark series risk counteracting ‘inspirational’ crises content by reinforcing a ‘climate delay discourse’ (Lamb et al., 2020) that could instead discourage progressive socio-political change

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Paolo Carelli and Anna Sfardini (Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore)

### **Sustainable culture through unscripted TV: roles, functions and models in Italian television system**

In the last years, sustainable issues in their environmental, social and economic dimensions have increasingly grown in the field of television studies and imposed themselves as a relevant aspect through different perspectives, both on the side of production practices made up by creators and companies, and on the side of their representation within plots and narrative mechanisms of scripted and unscripted programs. While in TV series, sustainability is often relegated to the way through which locations are represented (with particular attention to landscapes, cultural traditions, environmental and natural resources that evoke a sort of “postcard effect”), unscripted TV reveals itself as a more interesting field to analyze the impact of sustainability in television production and creation strategies; in fact, due to their nature of programs that prevalently represent everyday life practices and real settings and people, genres such as cooking-shows, reality-shows, documentaries, infotainment and informative TV shows could be an ideal space for highlighting and exploring green and sustainable topics and contributing to spread a shared “sustainable culture”.

Drawing on continuous research carried out by CeRTA (Research Centre on Television and Audiovisual Media at Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore) on the impact of unscripted programs in the whole TV offer and on the role of places and their functions and identities within media content, this paper aims at defining some key traits of the narration of sustainability in Italian television system taking into account historical connections and national specificities in declining cultural and environmental aspects (such as folkloric traditions, food and wine specialties, eco-friendly practices, protection of natural resources and so on) that represent the backbone of the culture of sustainability in Italy. More specifically, we’ll focus on different modes of connection between sustainable issues and places in which TV programs are located, on the prevailing goals of Sustainability Index addressed in narration mechanisms, and on the level of engagement of the audiences towards sustainable practices built up by the programs, in order to highlight some paradigmatic models of the ways through which this crucial phenomenon could be considered in TV production industry and open to further reflection perspectives for media and television studies.

**Wednesday, 3 July 2024, 1pm**

## Consumption and the Industry

Vincenzo De Masi (Beijing Normal University - Hong Kong Baptist University, United International College Zhuha)

### **Evolution of Media Consumption in China: A Comparative Analysis of OTT and Metaverse Platforms Amidst the Political Milestone of President Xi Jinping's Third Re-election.**

The Chinese television industry is about to undergo a paradigm transition due to younger consumers' internet consumption habits. This article analyses the Chinese television industry's current situation and future, using empirical data and the cultural shift towards internet viewing. The exposition begins with a description of China's

television market, supported by Statista forecasts of US\$103.60 billion in TV & Video revenue by 2024. The market volume for this segment is estimated to reach US\$126.50 billion by 2028, growing 5.12%. Over-the-Top (OTT) video is expected to generate income three times that of traditional television, a trend that began in 2019 and shows a consistent development in the market.

The paper explains why younger generations choose on-demand material and mobile and virtual reality platforms like the Metaverse. This transition away from live viewing reflects Chinese society's technological, social, and economic changes. The study examines how these changes affect content consumption, particularly among adolescents who are disengaged from traditional broadcasting. The paper uses President Xi Jinping's third re-election at the "20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China" to contrast traditional media dissemination with digital platforms and social media's growing influence. This comparative study shows the difference between traditional media consumption and digital storytelling, especially among younger generations. Television's future is predicted in the context of China's fast developing digital infrastructure. It analyses how cutting-edge content delivery networks, AI, and machine learning will change viewing personalisation. The paper proposes that classic television forms will merge with digital developments in the future. This study forecasts that China's television landscape is on the cusp of a significant transformation. The advancement of OTT platforms foretells a future where content consumption, creation, and distribution are predominantly digital. As a new, tech-savvy generation emerges, it mandates adaptability from content creators, broadcasters, advertisers, and legislators, who must now address the complexities of an evolving digital-first media ecosystem.

Nino Domazetovikj (imec-SMIT-VUB)

### **Exploring Global SVOD Commissioning in Flanders, Norway, and Ireland: A Small Markets Perspective on Production Sustainability**

The emergence of global SVOD services has fundamentally redefined audiovisual industry norms at a global scale (Lotz, 2023). This paradigm shift resonates within the European audiovisual sector, where the transformation is marked not only by a significant uptake in SVOD services and changing viewing preferences, but also by the rise of new industry players and structures altering production dynamics. With global SVODs increasingly competing for viewing attention and content commissions, legacy players of national audiovisual industries have been confronted by profound disruption of established industry practices (Cunningham and Silver, 2013; Evens and Donders, 2018; Lobato, 2019; Raats, 2023).

The globalisation of the audiovisual industry resonates with scholarly discussions on the need to revisit established perspectives on media industries as the business models of global subscription video-on-demand (SVOD) providers continue to impact national production and distribution dynamics (McDonald, 2021). Earlier research has focused on how television fiction has been distributed globally (Weissman, 2012), the

emergence of new forms of transnational television (Bondebjerg et al. 2017) and shifts in viewing and its implications (Jenner, 2016). More recently, within the European context, researchers have explored the relationship between global SVODs and national audiovisual industries, how legacy media organisations are strategically repositioning amid the rise of streamers (D'Arma et al., 2020), the political and market contexts influencing the emergence of domestic streaming services (Raats and Evens, 2021), and the policy responses to global SVODs and how these are influenced by national regulatory traditions (Kostovska et al., 2023). While research on TV scripted drama underscore the increasing importance of global SVODs as investors (Fontaine, 2022), there's still a considerable gap in our understanding as to how SVODs investment strategies differ from that of broadcasters and what are the consequences. In addition, little is known about actual investments and how new forms of transnational production reshape existing production models and add to sustainability of television sectors.

In this research, relying on theoretical underpinnings from media industry studies (Holt and Perren, 2011) and television studies (Gray and Lotz, 2019), we study how changing production dynamics, along with contextual factors, shape the investment strategies of global streamers. Particularly we focus on SVODs in small markets, and what repercussions this has for existing audiovisual production. We do so by adopting a mixed-method approach of total production volume to identify the distinctive patterns of SVOD production within an in-depth case study of a small European market, i.e. Flanders, Ireland and Norway. To discern the differences and similarities in production patterns among these three markets, the research relies on analysis of total production volume for the period 2016-2023. Our findings provide valuable insights into the evolving landscape of European audiovisual production, highlighting the critical role of scripted content in the strategies of SVOD services and public and commercial broadcasters. The comparative analysis in this article reveals that the distinct economic and cultural contexts of the three small audiovisual markets uniquely modulate the impact of Internet distribution and the proliferation of global streaming services.

Theoretically, this research aims to contribute to the existing body of knowledge on small audiovisual markets (Raats and Jensen, 2021; Nissen and Lowe, 2011; Hjort, 2007; Ibrus and Rohn, 2019). Recognising the lack of empirical research on small audiovisual markets, we aim to provide comparative analysis with focus on serialised TV fiction in assessing global SVODs interaction with national industries and their impact on sustainability of television as a sector of the economy. Serialised TV fiction has become one of the most expensive production types, placing substantial financial demands on broadcasters and commercial operators and affecting the overall TV ecosystem (Raats and Wauters, 2018; Picard, 2009). In addition, it is this particular production type where global streaming services like Netflix have invested heavily, leading to a marked effect on the sustainability and growth of smaller markets. These aspects emphasise the critical role serialised TV fiction plays in revealing how online subscription services are reshaping the television landscape, especially in smaller markets. Our findings indicate that despite similar catalysts for disruption, the global streamers' localisation strategies are influenced by the unique dynamics of pre-existing market conditions (see also Lotz et al., 2021).



Fallen Matthews (Dalhousie University, Canada)

### **Cultural Alchemy in the Midnight Society: *Are You Afraid of the Dark?* and Its Influence on Children's Media**

This paper delves into the captivating world of children's media, with a specific focus on Canadian and transnational perspectives, using the iconic series *Are You Afraid of the Dark?* as its central case study. By exploring the historical context in which this beloved show was created, we can gain profound insights into the evolution of children's media in Canada and its impact on the global stage. Against the backdrop of the late 1980s and early 1990s, a period marked by significant technological advancements and shifting cultural influences, *Are You Afraid of the Dark?* emerged as a pioneering force in the realm of children's entertainment. Within this timeframe, the landscape of children's media was undergoing transformative changes. The advent of cable television, the proliferation of home video, and the emergence of interactive media platforms reshaped the way young audiences engaged with content. Drawing from diverse cultural influences and transnational storytelling techniques, *Are You Afraid of the Dark?* managed to captivate the hearts and imaginations of viewers both in Canada and abroad. This paper explores how the series represented Canadian identity and themes while resonating with international audiences. Through a meticulous examination of historical records, production insights, and critical reception, this research sheds light on the show's cultural significance and its role in shaping subsequent Canadian children's media. By delving into this fascinating history, I uncover the enduring legacy of *Are You Afraid of the Dark?* and its lasting impact on the global perception of Canadian children's media.

**Thursday, 4 July 2024, 9am**

### **The Representation of Work**

Christina Wilkins (University of Birmingham, UK)

#### **The work/life balance in contemporary (speculative) television**

Work has been a consistent feature of television programming – with office-spaces being the basis for entire sitcoms (*The Office*, *Parks and Rec*), or an offshoot of a storyline in a soap (Underworld factory in *Coronation Street*). This broadly reflects how work is featured in our everyday lives – it is a central part, but not all of it. In the wake of the pandemic, and with changes to work culture (through technological means, for instance), the centrality of work has increasingly started to bleed into other aspects of life. We now often work in the same space that we live, and are constantly available via email or phone to answer work queries, weakening the divide between work life and our 'own' lives. Two recent television series begin to think about this problem in interesting ways. The first, Apple TV's *Severance* (2022-), posits a world in which a worker can be 'severed' – i.e. divided into a 'work' self and an 'outside' self. The ethics of it are

debated through the storylines, but it functions as a solution to the problem of the work/life balance, which ultimately ends up reading as dystopian. The second, Marvel's *Loki* (2022-), focuses on the work of the TVA (Time Variance Authority) in trying to maintain an 'approved' timeline, which involves finding 'variants' that would disrupt it, and removing them. It transpires by the end of season 1 that the agents who work for the TVA were previously variants themselves, who have been brainwashed to think they have always worked for the TVA and have no knowledge of their previous lives. This raises questions about the divide between self/work as the selves of the TVA agents have been voided for the purpose of the 'work'. That *Loki*'s aesthetics present an outdated bureaucratic space (nicely indicated by the tones and props) suggest this balance, too, is outdated and needs to be rethought. That both series are speculative fiction/sci-fi is interesting – in offering a future where the work/life balance is taken to an extreme, both seem to indicate that it is dystopian. Yet, both feature on platforms (Apple, Disney) that are reliant on labour and the framework of late-stage capitalism to continue their success. These ideological clashes are interesting to consider. In this paper, I will explore how work (in these iterations) functions as barrier to health and agency, and offers warnings for what may be to come, despite the tensions of the platforms they are distributed on.

Alexander Beare; Robert Boucaut (University of Adelaide)

### **Cultivating a Capitalist Utopia? The Textual Prevalence of Apple's Corporate Identity in Apple TV+ Originals.**

In recent years, large tech corporations like Apple and Amazon have invested significant capital in developing their own Subscription Video on Demand (SVOD) services and original programming. Popular platforms like Apple TV+ and Amazon Prime have been purposefully designed to fit into large corporate structures. In many ways, such SVOD services bring obvious benefits for a corporation—in addition to subscription revenue, they can be used to boost hardware sales or collect user data. For example, a typical episode of Apple TV+'s most popular original programme, *Ted Lasso*, will feature up to 36 shots of Apple products. While this type of egregious product placement is common, this paper interrogates some of the deeper and more challenging textual implications that come from original programming on these platforms. With reference to Amanda Lotz and Ramon Laboto's understanding of the supportive structures of streaming services, this paper provides a close textual analysis of the Apple TV+ original programmes *Ted Lasso* (2021-2023), *Loot* (2022-present) and *Mythic Quest* (2020-present). Apple has a distinctive and recognisable brand identity that places an emphasis on individuality, disruption and "thinking different." We contend that this corporate persona is intrinsically woven into the characters, themes and cultural messages of the Apple TV+ originals themselves. These programmes all feature outsider characters who, through their eccentric genius, disrupt the status quo and find great success. Ironically, instead of dismantling or challenging the real-world issues they depict, Apple TV+ originals will often sublimit their narrative wants to Apple's broader corporate needs. All three of these programs work to selectively harness real-world context to create a storyworlds with utopic world visions that are predicated on the existence of "good" capitalism and consumption. Ultimately, we

argue that this highlights the textual implications and consequences that come with the paradigm 'supportive' SVOD services.

Tatiana Chervyakova (Universidade Lusófona - Centro Universitário de Lisboa)

### **How television business practices deal with a conflicting regulatory landscape: the case of small European countries**

This paper examines data and preliminary outcomes of the Horizon project Mapping Media for Future Democracies, in particular those that contribute to a better understanding of contemporary regulatory/self-regulatory instruments in use by television broadcasters across different European countries. We will in particular focus on the structure of the supply side of the market in small European countries using Portugal as a case study of the often complex and contentious relation between business models, existing legislation, and self-regulatory policies of television broadcasters and in particular PSB in Europe. Our research highlights how the mission and legal obligations to promote diversity and pluralism broadcasters sign to, and that constitute a core basis for democracy and political participation, are challenged by several elements, namely political and economic ones. Our paper addresses the media system sustainability and pluralism in terms of the influence of the legislative environment and the reality expressed in the economic model of commercial television, which potentially affects editorial decision-making.

Agenda setting theory (McCombs and Shaw, 1968) claims that how TV channels strategize their programming, priming, and framing across the TV day, shapes the audience's perception of "what to think about". This approach corresponds with media performativity which contributes to the construction of social meaning (Mateus, 2018). But we will argue that the reversed agenda setting, which has become relevant due to the emergence of social networks, takes a significant place. In our case, the role of "reverser" is played by ratings, which directly influence the commercial success of TV channels and determine program policy. The news economy is linked to sensationalism: the more shocking the event, the more public attention. Therefore, to maintain competitive figures due to the saturation/boredom effect (Downs, 1972) and the nature of public attention in multi-screen environments, TV channels have to resort to tools that artificially support this interest — demand-side paradigm (Uscinski, 2014). Media as a two-sided market sells content and the audience to advertisers. A popular technique of news agenda design for raising ratings due to bright emotional components is sensationalism and trickster-speakers exposing emotional attachment, potentially influencing polarisation. In the case of Portugal, the broadcasters carry out their activities, based on three elements: the country's legislation, business model, and ethical code. In their missions, TV channels proclaim pluralism and political diversity, often failing to pass the reality test.

This paper investigates the reasons such as the business model of private channels that compete for high ratings among the audience highlighting the reversed nature of agenda

setting due to the rating hostage effect and possible checks and balances. The paper focuses on Portugal as this media market can be characterized as small, which makes the economic factor for such a market vital, with a relatively small advertising market, as well as the significant influence of other countries. The Portuguese example is exemplary of other European countries also with high levels of free speech, pluralism, and media trust in a multi-party political system. It can help us understand how television broadcasters are trying to adapt to a changing landscape often sacrificing pluralism and diversity.