Scripted and staged : designing fiction for the reality tv age

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SCRIPTED AND STAGED. DESIGNING FICTION FOR THE REALITY TV AGE

Guest Editor's Introduction

The term *fiction*, just as many other terms employed in mass communications as an academic field, can assume several meanings, depending on its specific use and context. This following thematic section of *Studies in Communication Sciences* intends to shed light on just two of these contexts:

There is, for once, *fiction* as a rather pragmatic and summary description of certain textual genres and formats which are considered part of media entertainment and therefore do, in *fact*, correspond to specific production principles and respective organizational structures.

And then there is *fiction* as an epistomological category, as some kind of rhetorical ideal type of speech, the respective typology based on the assumption that fictional texts (be they oral, written or audiovisual) have some qualities of *narrativity* in common, while some other traits set them apart from other established types of narrative speech - be these journalistic, or historical, or documentary modes of expression.

Conventional use of the terms implies that there is no necessary grounds in *facticity* nor some indispensable referring back to events that "actually" happened - and therefore no need for journalistic or scientific proof of the claims and propositions made. On the other hand the sheer *idea* of fictional speech (the term, again, encompassing its various manifestations in different media) does imply some rules as to how to designate - and recognize - fiction as such, how to gain and maintain credibility, and how to cue the receptive processes of sense-making as somewhat facultative and open-ended, with regards to the plot presented and the story, or stories, told.

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The following pages do focus on *TV fiction*, and more precisely on *European* TV fiction, as set apart from *non-fiction* TV and confronted - in an era and territory increasingly marked by what Umberto Eco anticipatory coined "neotelevisione"[1] - with what has lately become widely known (and largely discussed) as *Reality TV*.

In a first section of *Full Papers* some important statistical facts and overall observations are presented with regards to *fiction* as an undeniable, if contested, television reality in today's European Common Market. Jean-Pierre Candeloro and Giuseppe Richeri "did the counts" and, by way of retrieving and commenting recent data on behalf of the production and distribution of TV fiction, present a rather bleak picture of the encouraging measurements taken and the results obtained with regards to a stronger position of homegrown European fiction. Their paper is followed by some powerful and provocative suggestions by Milly Buonanno as to how to invite *foreign* fiction as a migratory, and cultural, force into this considerably well- (or over-?) protected realm which is the European TV fiction landscape. Finally, two National case studies are provided by Michele Sorice (on the history and current situation of Italian TV fiction) and Tanja Hackenbruch (the case of a Swiss *fiction* which obviously struggled with language barriers as well as cultural differences).

A second section then looks at (mostly TV) fiction as generic ideal type and rhetorical means of expression, with some introductory reflection on philosophical concepts of fiction versus *lie / disclosure* offered by Michele Amadò. His paper is followed by some tentative propositions as to how to differentiate mediated television fiction from - in fact, just as mediated - television *non-fiction* (Ursula Ganz-Blaettler). The sub-section closes on Martin Luginbuehl's analytical, and revealing historical look back at the beginnings of Swiss television and the emergence of *news programs*, which had yet to define, and convincingly (re-)construct, some kind of televisual *authenticity*.

No thematic section on selected aspects of European TV fiction would be complete without an actual outlook for the possible *things to come*. Three authors do open the debate on future formats and formulas, with Armando Fumagalli and Luca Manzi identifying, or proposing some gen-

[1] See Umberto Eco (1983). TV. La trasparenza perduta. In: ECO, U. Sette anni di desiderio. Cronache 1977-1983, Milan: Bompiani, 163-179.

eral trends in the development of Italian television fiction and Gerd Hallenberger staking out some innovative, and definitely fruitbearing claims in the field of media analysis as textual and generic analysis.

My thanks, as guest editor and contributor to this thematic section of the *Studies in Communication Sciences*, go to Andrea Rocci and Eddo Rigotti for the editorial care and rigidity applied, to many anonymous reviewers, to Alessandra Filippi (for the patient correcting, re-correcting, and re-re-correcting of endless drafts and *bozze*), and, finally, to Francesco Casetti for opening the following sequence of papers with such a powerful and erudite *voice of knowledge*.

While some experts of mediated fiction do insist that Shakespeare was serious when he wrote *All's Well That Ends Well*, claiming that only such narratives can be considered good which come to some neat and well-expected closure, I tend to support the opposite claim whereas good stories need to open well in order to catch the listener's or viewer's interest and curiosity. Which goes for Casetti's preface, but - hopefully - also for the rest of this, and for many unexpected, innovative television *fictions* and *Reality shows* to come.