

SNEHA SINGH* - RUPINDER SINGH**

DISTURBING TIMES OF SERIES IN THE AGE OF OTT 3

Abstract

With the advent of various Over-The-Top (OTT) platforms, such as Netflix and Amazon Prime video, television series are no longer bound by its set temporal relation with its viewers. This paper identifies four temporalities imbibed within the TV series and analyses the changes in them. It argues that TV series is marked by liveness, embeddedness, anchoring, structuring of social time and a mediatic sequence; and these are being reformulated by OTT.

Keywords

Television; OTT; seriality; temporality.
ISSN: 03928667 (print) 18277969 (digital)
DOI: 10.26350/001200_000153
Licensed with CC BY-NC-SA 2.0

On May 26 2013, the US network FOX's series *Arrested Development* (FOX, 2003-2006; Netflix 2013-) made its return to Netflix after seven years and promptly triggered the act of "binge-watching"¹. What followed was a race amongst critics and fans. Some watched it overnight, while others took it into the weekend. This is one of the many examples that illustrate how the phenomena of binge, or "continuous watching" became so dominant a practice on OTT². Netflix now even points out the exact number of run-hours needed to binge-finish a series of many seasons; Amazon Prime has a category called "Binge-Worthy." Furthermore, television producers are discovering that releasing a series one episode a week, such as the new *Star Trek Discovery* (CBS, 2017-), on OTT does not garner enough viewers. Thus, the season-wide availability of *Arrested Development* may be indicative of a further evolution of television as a medium, or as Markus Stauff posits, its constant reinvention³.

* Bauhaus-Universität Weimar – sneha.singh@uni-weimar.de.

** Jagran Lake City University, Bhopal India – architecture.rupinder@gmail.com.

¹ J. Jurgensen, "Binge Viewing: TV's Lost Weekends", in *The Wall Street Journal*, July 2012, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052702303740704577521300806686174>. Also see, P. Brembilla, "This Cultural Creation of Binge Watching, I tempi del consumo personalizzato", in F. Cleto - F. Pasquali, eds., *Tempo di serie*, Milan 2018. Brembilla points out a Netflix sponsored survey that found out that more than 61% users already participated in binge-watching and were hoping for a more complex plot.

² OTT is an abbreviation of "Over the Top" (as of another platform, hence the moniker). It refers to online streaming services that deliver video content on almost all kinds of video enabled devices. We have employed OTT in the generic sense of such content-delivery and not focused on the differences of Amazon Prime, Netflix, Disney Plus etc. "What is the definition of Over The Top (OTT)?", last modified May 25, 2021, <https://www.adjust.com/glossary/ott-over-the-top/>

³ M. Stauff, *Das neue Fernsehen: Machtanalyse, Gouvernementalität und digitale Medien*, Münster: Lit, 2005: 17.

In other words, OTT is reworking out television's relation to the spectator, its structuring of social mores, and the manner it establishes the temporal rhythms of life. For example, Lynn Spigel points out TV's pivotal role in formulating the US post-war nuclear suburban family unit⁴. The complete living-room in America was realigned to face the TV in the '60s. And such restructuring by TV happened across different broadcast spectrums and in different countries.

Furthermore, television is not bound by a shared screen or a shared space. TV does not occur in space, but rather is the *space of occurrence*. What happens on broadcast TV is always *an event*, in a single social time-and-space, and binding all spectators⁵. By the 80s, this became even more potent due to intertextuality, that is, television series began referring to other television series. A rather late example, *The Big Bang Theory* (CBS, 2007-19), at least in its first three seasons, continuously referred to other series such as *Star Trek* (NBC, 1966-69) or *Deep Space 9* (Syndication, 1993-99). Amazingly, at its point of "live airing", the audience could easily have watched some of these other shows, albeit in reruns, and may as well be sitting next to Sheldon (one of the characters of *Big Bang Theory*)! Television is not a frame through which to "escape" into another world, but rather the world-reference *through* which to observe. Lorenz Engell succinctly summarizes,

[Television] shaped entire ways of life, introduced and accompanied the age of consumption, and given the nuclear family their economy, morality, daily routines, and everyday knowledge. It [...] defined political power structures [...] exponentially increased the number of images produced. It has created and established temporal structures –from daily and weekly rhythms to the basic understanding of actuality and eventfulness to the practices of expectation and memory⁶.

Television formulates, structures, and participates in a lived temporal world. Generations are marked by such shows as *The Brady Bunch* (ABC, 1969-74), or *Friends* (NBC, 1994-2004).

Binge watching is but one indicator of the manner television as a medium is changing. With OTT the space of occurrence is now the event of availability. This paper analyzes such changes in temporality under four categories. *Time One* is the internal time spanned within the narrative. *Time Two* is the social lived time of the viewers, that is the period of its "airing". These broadly overlap with narrative theory. Gérard Genette posits three forms of narrative-temporal relations: 'story,' 'discourse,' and 'narrating.' Story is the sequence of events in the presented fictional world ('diegetic' time), discourse the time spent in presentation and reception of these events in its active form – here it will be the act of broadcasting and the act of watching – while narrating is the time of the narrating act which describes the spatio-temporal position of the narrative voice⁷. Other narrative devices employed in TV series also strengthen such a reading. The series *Dallas* (CBS 1978-1991), for example, passes off the character Bobby Ewing's death (S8, E30) and the subsequent events as just a dream of another character. It is only under-

⁴ L. Spigel, *Make Room for TV: Television and the Family Ideal in Post-War America*, Chicago: University of Chicago, 1992: 39.

⁵ Marshall McLuhan argues that selective addressing is not possible on television. M. McLuhan, *The Medium is the Message*, Toronto: Random House, 1967: 125.

⁶ L. Engell, "On the Difficulties of Television Theory", in M. Stauff, ed., *Thinking through Television*, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2019: 17-18.

⁷ G. Genette, *Narrative Discourse. An Essay on Method* (1972), Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980.

stood by the viewer to be otherwise. This is the classic *mise-en-abîme* where the diegetic space alludes to yet another interiority, but accessible largely, or often only to the viewer “outside”⁸. *Time Three* is the mediatic sequence. And lastly, *Time Four* is that of lived life, the ‘actual’ aging of both the viewer and the actors during the airing span of a serial.

1. TIME ONE

In the sitcom *How I Met Your Mother* (CBS, 2005-14) the main protagonist, Ted Mosby, sits down to narrate to his children in 2030 the story of how he met, well, their mother. The story flashbacks by twenty-five years, and with this, the narrated time is set. But contrary to expectations, the narrative does not unfold in a straight-forward manner; rather it meanders⁹. However, at the start of almost every episode there is a return to that moment of 2030 – it is the finality towards which the sitcom is always moving, and this “reset-to-zero” anchors the temporal span in spite of the multiple subplots, new characters, flashbacks, and flash-forwards. This also allows viewers to remain immersed in the narrative, even when they miss an episode. This fixed narrated time (of twenty-five years) can be denoted as Time One A. The stretchable actual run-time of nine seasons can be denoted as Time One B. One can read Time One A as story-time and One B as discourse time within the framework of Genette’s narrative theory¹⁰. The reset-to-zero too, for example, too is a narrative trope not specific to TV series – it can also be found in serialized narratives, such as *Thousand and One Nights*¹¹.

It is possible, however, to suggest that camera-space has a distinct nature. For example, it is always in a present¹² and the portrayals of past-and-future in flashbacks and flashforwards still have this sense of presence. Therefore, sometimes a film deploys a black-and-white or sepia image to denote a past event, or visual cues such as a “uniform” to denote a future one. Time to some extent can be depicted non-verbally say as the camera image turns day to night – but this only depicts a duration of the changing present. It is only with narrative that the other two tenses get denoted. Such distinctiveness of an ever-present¹³ can be illustrated by *How I Met Your Mother*; where the narration appears to be immanent in the present – even though the story is narrated from a point in future. This inexorable logic of the camera-space can perhaps also be illustrated by TV’s news coverage. Newspapers narrate with sequence of actions, causalities, analyses, and statements. In the utterance of the anchor TV news does this too. But the camera-space stipulates a liveness of the “event.” Thus, there is the reporter at the ‘scene,’ or in “conversation” with the anchor to mark a sense of the present or live. And sometimes there are just re-enactments.

⁸ For Meier Sternberg, “the play of suspense/curiosity/surprise between represented and communicative time” defines narrativity. Meier Sternberg, “Telling in Time (I): Chronology and Narrative Theory”, in *Poetics Today*, 11, 4 (1990): 902.

⁹ C. Bryant, K. Wright, “How I Met Your Mother ‘Last Forever’”, in L.D. Howard, ed., *Television Finales: From Howdy Doody to Girls*, Syracuse University Press, 2018: 173-178.

¹⁰ Genette, *Narrative Discourse. An Essay on Method*. See also S. Chatman, “Genette’s Analysis of Narrative Time Relations”, *L’Esprit Créateur*, 14, 4 (1974): 353-368.

¹¹ U. Marzolph, “Making Sense of the Nights: Intertextual Connections and Narrative Techniques in the Thousand and One Nights”, *Narrative Culture*, 1, 2 (2014): 239-258.

¹² A. Sesonkske, “Time and Tense in Cinema”, *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 38, 4 (1980): 419-426 and “Cinema Space-Variations on the Real World” in D. Carr - E. Casey, eds., *Explorations in Phenomenology*, The Hague, 1973: 399-410. Also see A. Nahum Garcia Martínez, “A Storytelling Machine: The Complexity and Revolution of Narrative Television”, *Between*, 6 May 2016: 18.

¹³ S. Cavell, “The Fact of Television”, *Daedalus*, 111, 4 (1982): 75-96.

A far more significant aspect is the pause in-between episodes. In the catenation form of the series, each episode, ideally, is both stand-alone and a mini cliff-hanger that binds it to the next episode. The cliff-hanger motif is most powerfully evoked at the pause in-between the seasons. One of the most renowned season-finale was J.R. Ewing's death in *Dallas* (CBS, 1978-91). It created a roar with "Who Shot J.R.?" (S3, E25) which extended to such outlets as a popular t-shirt slogan, magazine covers, a comedy show and even political campaigns¹⁴. Thus the pause in-between of the week or season-break in a TV series is unlike that of the chapters of a novel, where the reader can continue reading or stop and pick up later. The ellipse is embedded in the life of the spectator, and as demonstrated by *Dallas*, in the larger social milieu. During the week-long pause, while the spectator is performing her daily chores, the characters of the series (away from run-time) presumably are too. If she is preparing for Christmas, so are they. Furthermore, the weekly and season cliff-hangers of the TV series induce an anticipation of the events of the next "airing". This in turn facilitates actual interactions in social circles. "Did you watch the finale of *Friends* last night?" becomes as topical as "the weather on Sunday." Amanda Lotz observes that 'Water cooler talk' is propelled by the immediacy to discuss last night television stories next day at work¹⁵. The ellipses of TV series cement one's membership to the group, and often becomes its *raison d'être*.

In the lived temporality of the spectator, this concatenated structure of the series is then an open diegesis that allows viewers to construct an overarching story-world using information they accumulate from their own lives as well as their continuous history of viewing¹⁶. The embedded viewer develops an empathetic relation with the characters¹⁷ and over a longer span this allows for a life-like complexity unlike any other medium¹⁸. In fact, here the episodic narrative couples with the "relatable" characters. Thus, Time One in Broadcast TV is both immanent in the series and part of the larger world. This occurs even when the narrative is not in the same time-period of the airing, as that of the period drama¹⁹. The reverse is also possible. *The Simpsons* (FOX, 1989-) has run for 31 years, but the narrative time has remained an ever-present now, with characters not having aged a day. And yet it has remained embedded in the life of its audience. Engell's observation summarizes this,

(O)ne of the main ontological features of television is the familiarization of the world, which leads to the erasure of the exteriority of the world (Anders,1956). Television thus becomes a question of space – namely, the relationship between some 'inside' and some 'outer world'²⁰.

¹⁴ "Commentary: The 'Dallas' Shot That Was Heard Round the World: Television: Three Hundred Million Viewers Found out 'Who Shot J.R.?' 10 Years Ago This Week on the Soap Opera that Embodied the '80s.", *Los Angeles Times*, November 23, 1990, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1990-11-23-ca-5345-story.html>.

¹⁵ A.D. Lotz, *The Television Will Be Revolutionized*, New York: New York University Press, 2014: 62.

¹⁶ J. Mittell, "Film and Television Narrative", in *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007: 164.

¹⁷ T. Bridgeman, "Time and Space", in *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007: 53.

¹⁸ The empathetic act of reading can be traced back to Mikhail Bakhtin, but here the intermingling of lived and read is far more than within a text. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination. Four Essays*, Austin: University of Texas Press, 84-258.

¹⁹ Television series still follow Meier Sternberg's arguments about the workings of time (events, developments, changes of state) in some time-medium, verbal and/or otherwise, but not perforce in their original order of time. Meier Sternberg, "Telling in Time (I): Chronology and Narrative Theory", in *Poetics Today*, 11, 4 (1990): 902.

²⁰ Engell, "On the Difficulties of Television Theory": 194.

This erasure of the exterior world of the spectator and the interior world of the series, through the “lived” moments of the segmented limbo, as well as intertextuality, is what sets Broadcast TV series as distinct.

Does this embedded presence come through on OTT and “binge” watching, that is, beyond that of the narrative structure? The embeddedness of the weekly ellipses, cliff-hangers and the drama generated by season endings are now attenuated. OTT allows the viewer to push ahead seamlessly. Or pause at will. Temporality within the narrative persists but is not so easily “live”. Similarly, erasure of the distinction between “inside-outside” may occur or may not. Lastly, a pause in-between can range from unanticipated minutes to weeks. It is in complete control of the viewer. And so, even the framing of advertisement breaks, and placements have disappeared. In all this OTT (re)structures Time One to be not dissimilar to other literary works. Alberto N. Garcia coined the term “TV novels” for broadcast era, but it now appears more relevant to OTT streaming²¹. In fact, both Broadcast TV and OTT platforms have even begun experimenting with a hybrid between film and series, as a limited long series as in evident in the *Mandalorian* (Disney + 2019) or *True Detective* (HBO 2014-) – each season is a composite one long episode.

Overall, with OTT, Time One’s embeddedness is now personal.

2. TIME TWO

The specificity of Time Two, as the social lived time of the viewers, is its *airing* time, the point at which it went “live” With this, Broadcast TV does not just structure itself but also the daily and weekly routine of the spectator and the overall social rhythm. In India, the TV serialization of the epic *Ramayana*, first aired in 1987, had a captive 82% audience. Streets would be empty, shops closed, doctors unavailable, all activities, public and private, paused during this airing. It structured all social rhythms. It was so powerful that the state network recast the series during the Covid lockdown²². Similarly, *all* Brazilian TV sets were tuned to the finale of *Roque Santeiro* (1985-86). 100%!

We have discussed the correlation of the week-long ellipse of the series above. Similarly, airing time structures viewers’ weekly activities, as they set out to be home or meet in a social gathering to watch their chosen series at *its* chosen particular time. Inversely, broadcasters also worked out the airing time to match the social norms. In some countries Sunday is prime-time, and in others it is Thursday. *Ramayana*, for example, aired on Sunday mornings; *Roque Santeiro* aired from Monday to Saturday at 8:25pm, but not on Sundays.

One had to be in “time” for the airing, otherwise “what did I miss?” would be followed by self-admonishment. The reruns or the teasers during the week do assist, but the actual act of watching is an event in itself. The liveliness of the series is of the same valence as sports telecast or such events as Apollo’s moon landing. The characters Ross and Rachael’s breakup in the series *Friends* or the superlative goal scored by Messi are

²¹ A. Nahum García Martínez, *A Storytelling Machine: The Complexity and Revolution of Narrative Television*, Italian Association for the Theory and Comparative History of Literature, 2016, p. 12. <http://hdl.handle.net/10171/41400>.

²² <https://www.outlookindia.com/blog/story/india-news-ramanand-sagars-ramayan-then-and-now-politics-of-an-epic-kind/4161>/retrieved November 2021. As per Wikipedia, this series garnered more than 650 million viewers over the decades.

similar ‘happenings’ (*geschehen*). One could always record it, but it had occurred *so* last night.

Airing time is then a shared time for a social group, even when not in the same specific space or in front of the same screen *or* a social group in any other way. Thus, television is essentially a “single screen” at a “single time” and in a way with a “single” audience. This synchronicity is different from cinema, even though films have precise Friday night release dates. Cinema still allows a certain window to catch the film. This then is TV’s *liveness* of Time Two that it *structures* and *anchors* social and personal time.

With OTT this liveness is diminished. By its very nature, streaming is any screen, anytime, and personal. Couples fight when one goes on to the next episode without waiting for the other. The ensuing social interactions have also changed, the *liveness* is gone. Consequently, there is no immediacy of *next day*. Now, the ensuing discussion is best exemplified by social media – it is similar to groups around vintage cars or killer bikes. In other words, OTT allows personal *idiosyncratization* to modify *Time Two*. Content is now consumed almost “privately”²³ – or at best, as in literature or cinema. Furthermore, OTT allows one to be nostalgic, say, focus on the 90s, like in old phonograms. The hinge of the series with the present is severed²⁴. We may watch TV series, but on OTT it is unlikely to watch the world with us.

3. TIME THREE

Time Three is how the technical features of the medium affect temporality. Broadcast TV prescribes a clear sequence: Teaser/Commercial Break/Recap/Intro/Main body/credits. One could switch channels, but not the sequence. Another aspect of this mediatic time is that it is not dependent on the viewer. It never stopped running, whether the viewer tuned in or not. Thus, while channel surfing, say in the 90s, one could feel that these different channels “lived” with each other just as much with the spectator, or with intertextuality, even without the spectator. The broadcast was always on, with the viewer, or without. It was a mediated world in itself.

DVR did intervene to some extent, but the temporality of the series was not overpowered by it. For one, DVRs were dependent on “airing”. If you were recording a series, you could only do so *at* the time of airing, and one episode at a time. So, both embeddedness and anchoring remained. And so did the mediatic sequence prescribed by the broadcast.

With OTT this mediatic sequence has changed. For one, there is omission of recap and in-between pauses, and perhaps most importantly there is only a five-second window between two episodes. And all these are now at the behest of the viewer’s fingers. In Broadcast TV, recap was a necessary device given that the temporality of the TV was embedded within the temporality of the viewer, and thus came with the ellipse of a day or a week. Also, the narrative structure was so defined that if one missed an episode, with recap and reset-to-zero one could still manage to move on with the series. OTT’s series’ temporality is completely in control of the viewers; there is no missing out, and

²³ T.M. Sodano, “Television’s Paradigm (Time)Shift: Production and Consumption Practices in the Post-Network Era”, in M. Ames, ed., *Time in Television Narrative: Exploring Temporality in 21st Century Programming*, Jackson, Miss.: University Press of Mississippi, 2012.

²⁴ D. Johnson, “Party Like It’s 1999: Another Wave of Network Nostalgia,” in *Flow*, April 2015, <http://flowtv.org/2015/04/party-like-it-s-1999>.

therefore no recap is necessary. If a recap of an earlier season is required, say when a new season becomes available, it is done outside the sequence of the series, as some viewers may have just begun watching the earlier season and will seamlessly move to the new one. If there is still recap embedded in an older series, on OTT it now seems impertinent. Similarly, new series totally eschew reset-to-zero, such as *The Mandalorian* mentioned before, or even in the US Netflix mock-documentary series *American Vandal* (2017). The narrative of these ‘made-for-OTT’ series is akin to one large episode, broken for convenience or convention into smaller ones²⁵. Even new Broadcast TV series are changing their narrative structure. The Hannibal series (NBC 2013-15) eschews the weekly cliffhangers to adopt a more series-based writing²⁶. With this the ‘run-time’ of Broadcast TV is also not so easily stretchable in the manner it was earlier. Even when new characters are introduced, they tend now to be within the overall narrative, and not episodic, say as in *Seinfeld*.

In other words, OTT appears to foster an authorship of mediatic time: the viewer can pause, play, rewind, fast forward, leave, restart at will and convenience²⁷. But perhaps the most important new function is the average five to ten seconds countdown during the credits at the end of the episode after which the interface will automatically move to the next episode; and at the end of the series, to the next series. But now, Netflix, for example, has a machine-driven pause, which confirms whether the viewers are actively watching or not. This is in sharp contrast to the world of broadcast, with its inexorable live continuity, without end, even when the viewers switched off.

Engell argues that with every upgradation, a medium makes something possible that was not possible before. That is, media is fundamentally generative, actualized and opens a horizon of possibilities²⁸. This is very much manifested in the evolution from Broadcast TV to OTT. DVRs provided some control and allowed a modicum of de-anchoring. OTT has taken this control to the level of a new structure; the viewer can choose which content to play, when to play and how to play. Each OTT service now is a repository, library, archive with a “home” and “search” rather than the inexorable world of Broadcast TV. Thus, one could also argue the opposite of Engell’s statement, that with every generative move, something is lost. For, with the changes in mediatic time – as in the changes in liveness, embeddedness and anchoring of TV in the rhythm of life – the nature of series is losing something.

4. TIME FOUR

In his landmark essay, *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit*²⁹, Walter Benjamin makes some seminal observations about cinema. It would be a challenging exercise to speculate how this landmark essay would have included

²⁵ Brembilla, “This Cultural Creation of Binge Watching, I tempi del consumo personalizzato”. Brembilla coins the term *Being Bingable* and points out how *Fargo* (Fox 2014-) and *True Detective* (HBO 2014-) are better suited to OTT than say the episodic *Seinfeld*. Each season of these series are fixed number of episodes of what in effect is conceived as one long film. She notes, “True Detective diventa infatti la serie di punta del nuovo servizio stand-alone di streaming online di HBO, HBO Now, mentre i diritti di Fargo vengono acquisiti da Hulu”.

²⁶ Brembilla, “This Cultural Creation of Binge Watching, I tempi del consumo personalizzato”.

²⁷ Furthermore, while DVR/Tivo too provided similar although more limited control, there is a sense of liveness with OTT. DVR media was always after the event.

²⁸ Engell, “On the Difficulties of Television Theory”, 30.

²⁹ W. Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, translated by J.A Underwood, Penguin Books Limited, 2008. This essay has many versions in different languages.

television. Benjamin points out that unlike theater, in cinema the actor performs for a mechanical device. The camera does not hold still. It moves, changes angle, draws close-up, calls in multiple cameras to examine various facets and so on. There is also cut and repeat. What emerges for presentation then is stitched and edited together, and the viewer lends it temporal unity and narrative continuity. Benjamin summarizes that “the audience’s identification with the actor is really an identification with the camera”³⁰. As always with Benjamin, one could rephrase this; that neither the actor, nor the audience face each other as they do in theater, but they face the camera in *almost the same manner*. In other words, the camera may as well be examining the viewer instead of the actor.

Benjamin further argues that the actor cannot not take different personas for different roles in front of the camera, as they could in the direct immediacy of theater. Now the actor presents only herself and holds together her own inner persona for this surgical splitting, stitching, editing and examination of the camera. Benjamin dramatically adds, “for the first time – and this is the effect of the film – man has to operate with his whole living persona yet forgetting his aura”³¹. And one could easily add, so does the spectator.

Here is the lineation of a Time Four: TV is the device of both series *and* life. Because, unlike cinema, in a television series an actor does not present his “living persona” for a short period. *She lives and ages there*. For a series that usually spans considerable time, say more than six years, actors spend the majority of their time, usually eight hours a day, in front of the camera. Thus, unlike the *living persona* presented to cinema, what camera now records are the (Benjaminian) traces of life *as it writes* on the face and persona of the actor³². And *concurrently* the same also occurs in the persona of the viewer. As Chandler’s hairline recedes through the seasons on *Friends*, it also marks the passage of lived time for the viewers³³. It is the lived life that correlates on both sides of the camera. Thus, unlike cinema, in broadcast television it is not so much the actor but life (*Erlebnis*) that get presented, and viewed; and at least theoretically, contemplated.

In other words, the mediatic devices of the camera in Broadcast TV structures life – it examines and demands that the spectator too “operate with his whole living persona yet forgetting his aura”. Although written in another context, here Bernhard Siegert’s assertions can also be interjected:

Humans as such do not exist independently of cultural techniques of hominization, time as such does not exist independently of cultural techniques of time measurement, and space as such does not exist independently of cultural techniques of spatial control³⁴.

This changes with OTT. Binge-watching *collapses* what would otherwise have been the lived years of a series. Years can be watched in days or weeks – certainly not years. Whereas life may still be narrating the story-world of the series, in its reception this link has been broken. Now, just as the camera was a surgical instrument, the remote in the

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² “The trace is the appearance of a closeness, as far as what it left behind may be. The aura is an appearance of a distance, as close as that which evokes it may be. In the trace we get hold of the matter; in the aura it takes hold of us”. W. Benjamin: *Das Passagen-Werk. Gesammelte Schriften*, Band V: Frankfurt am Main, 1983: 560.

³³ This is different from the aspect of aging usually covered in scholarship. Cf. C. Lee Harrington, “Time, Memory, and Aging on the Soaps”, in M. Oró-Piqueras, A. Wohlmann, eds., *Serializing Age. Aging and Old Age in Tv Series*, Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2015: 25-47

³⁴ B. Siegert, *Cultural Techniques: Grids, Filters, Doors, and other Articulations of The Real*, New York 2015.

functions of stopping, repeating, dropping, forwarding, surfing reworks out the lived Time Four.

5. CONCLUSION

It may perhaps be too early to write a definitive conclusion on the changes wrought by OTT. Some have already claimed the death of what was once called a controlling, ever gazed upon cathode-ray device; something towards which Neil Postman expresses undiluted abhorrence³⁵. But for now, it is more productive to begin by considering OTT as continuation of an ever-evolving medium. Also, technological advancements rework out previously dominant media, as, for example, television did with radio. Thus, the conclusive mapping of OTT will also be a remapping of Broadcast TV. For example, Brembilla posits that there are two viewers now, one for OTT and one for Broadcast TV³⁶. This paper has argued within the medium, and that OTT transforms the relation of the viewer to seriality, and that this is predicated on the shifts in the nature of temporality. What with Broadcast TV was essentially ‘one screen-one time-one audience’ has now fragmented and become the “now-available”. OTT is in the process of transforming television as writing once did language or as the typewriter did writing or the Word-process did the typewriter.

In summary, there are at least five transformations traced in this paper. First is the collapse of the temporal ellipse between episodes, what we have termed its *embeddedness*. Consequently, its coupling with life has now been reformulated. Second, the discourse time is now the product of the viewer’s authorship. Even when the viewer does not disturb it with the remote, she chose not to do so, and so remains the author of it. Third is the *anchoring* and *structuring* of a common social world by the series. Airing was an event in the world-writ-large. The “now-available” on OTT does not do the same. Fourth, with the new technical features of OTT there is a new mediatic order of things. Fifth – and this is the opposite conclusion of the manner in which mass-media is normally considered – with OTT contemporary humanity may have lost yet one more chance of contemplating itself. Or at least the traces of life presented by the camera are being reformulated. In Benjaminian terms, it may at least raise the need for another storyteller of life³⁷.

³⁵ N. Postman, “Amusing Ourselves to Death”, *A Review of General Semantics*, 42, 1 (1985).

³⁶ Brembilla, “This Cultural Creation of Binge Watching, I tempi del consumo personalizzato”.

³⁷ W. Benjamin, *The Storyteller: Observations on the Works of Nikolai Leskov*, in H. Eiland, M.W. Jennings, eds., *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, 3: 1935-1938*, Harvard University Press, 2006.