Codes and Conventions of Contemporary TV Series Production and Reception

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Introduction

While cable TV, satellite technology and multi-channel networks have triggered the globalization of the TV market, wide screens, High Definition and Dolby Surround technology have revolutionized filmic realization, making television a serious rival of cinema and America the biggest player in the TV business.

With respect to these developments, this paper aims to show, to what extent codes and conventions of series production and reception have changed throughout the years. Trying to draw a comprehensive picture of contemporary U.S. prime time series and their cultural, generic and aesthetic impact, I will work out common types and features of shows like *CSI Las Vegas, Sex and The City, Dexter* or *Lost*, defining and analyzing the new and highly stylized genre of 'quality' TV.

The first part of this paper is dedicated to the multiple dimensions of serial drama as well as political and economic influences on the medium. After a short look into television studies, and their various fields and approaches, I will deal with TV industry and program policy in a multichannel environment and examine issues of cultural loss triggered by the U.S. monopoly on global television.

Exploring the inherent dynamics of serial narratives, and showing how U.S. prime time series combine the assets of traditional soap opera, serial and series, I will demonstrate how generic development, hybridization and subversion are part of the process by which television adapts to changes in society.

In a further step I will approach the subject of audience studies, discussing a recent ORF market and media study. Along with psychological aspects such as character identification and mood management, also U.S. shows' function as cultural trend-setter as well as common stereotypes and the effects of series characters as role models will be explored.

After a short overview of the most watched U.S. 'quality' shows in 2010, I will analyze several examples with respect to their multi-layered plot structure, innovative visual style, experimental narrative concepts and complex character constellations, demonstrating how they are designed to create huge and regular viewing communities and satisfy the growing hunger for information in our age.

The second part of this paper will focus on the crime genre, investigating to what extent detective fiction series have changed since the 1970s and why crime shows dominate today's prime time program. Examining the CBS success show *CSI Las Vegas* and comparing it to *Columbo* (NBC), I will exemplify how the current boom of forensic detective fiction mirrors the speed of our modern technological society and information era.

After a short insight into the marketing concept of contemporary franchise shows and their spin-offs, I will describe the televsual qualities of *CSI Las Vegas.*
First I will focus on formalist criteria such as cast, mise-en-scène, camera work, editing, sound and music. In a second step I will explore the series’ episode structure with its multiple story arcs and time-shifted peaks, all designed to keep up the stress level and maximize information density in order to tie the audience to their seats and keep them from zapping.

Discussing the sociocultural problematic of the show’s ideological codes and its detailed depiction of extreme violence, sex and dead bodies, I will finally take a look at television as a mirror of society and deal with the questions, why these series appeal to such a huge audience, and where this trend could lead us.
Chapter 1

Introduction to Television Studies

1.1 Television Studies

Television has become part of our everyday life, a medium with a certain truth claim as it appears almost like a window to the world. According to Glen Creeber (2006:1), our everyday acceptance of TV and its power to influence our perception of 'reality', make television studies crucially important. Nation Master statistics say that the average American spends 4 hours a day watching TV (cf. http://www.nationmaster.com/graph/med_tel_vie-media-television-viewing; June 28, 2010), being immersed in the carefully constructed reality on screen, and usually unaware about the huge machinery behind it.

Television Studies is a relatively new area of academic study, which is constantly growing. It developed from a range of inter-disciplinary approaches, involving Sociology, Politics, Communication Arts, Linguistics, History, Literature, Drama, Cultural Studies, Media and Film Studies . . . , which makes it an essentially pluralistic field. After the discipline went through several academic traditions and schools of thoughts, Creeber (cf. 2006:6) identifies four mayor approaches to contemporary Television, which are partly related:

1. Textual Analysis originated from Literary and Cultural Studies, putting special focus on form and content of the TV program, in particular the televisual representation of e.g. class, gender and race. Including semiotics, genre theory, narrative theory, ideological analysis, discourse analysis, feminism, postmodernism, content analysis and statistics, this approach can be qualitative as well as quantitative.

2. Audience and Reception Studies are based on Sociology and put special focus on audience response and public opinion, analyzing the way programs are marketed and discussed. Psychology, ethnography, anthropology, and audience research such as interviews, questionnaires, but also TV ratings are important sources of information. As competition in the TV business is hard and the race for viewers is never ending, audience studies and programme ratings have become a sort of bible to networks, and their influence on contemporary TV productions is highly visible.
3. Institutional Analysis have their roots in politics and mass communication research. Considering television as a whole from a political or socioecono-

mic point of view, the nature of media industry and policy, government legislation and regulation, as well as TV’s role in the public and private sphere are examined.

4. Historical Analysis focus on the historical development of television, which requires archival research as well as viewing and the assessment of old films or programs. But also political and sociocultural context are important to complete the picture, thus historical analysis are frequently combined with one of the methodologies mentioned above.

In order to provide a holistic view of contemporary series and the way they reflect on our society, this paper borrows from all four methodologies, describing important political, institutional and technological changes in the TV market, analyzing TV series in terms of ideology, aesthetics, and their sociocultural dimensions, as well as their development during the last decades.

Combining qualitative and quantitative approaches, I will give an overview of the genre, providing several examples of well-received series, analyzing their stylistic development and other important aspects with respect to the steadily increasing stress and information level in modern TV productions. To support my own observations with statistical data, I will refer to an ORF market and media study from 2008, which examines the audience response to contemporary U.S. series.

1.2 Television Ideology

In order to analyze television (and the media in general), it is highly important to understand its ideological dimensions. Ideology, at its most basic level, “is the way human beings come to understand the world and their place in it” (Creeber 2006: 44).

No matter if it is a political, religious or philosophical approach, ideology is a “way of seeing the world that is articulated through language, imagery, gesture, metaphor and so on.” (Creeber 2006: 45)

Originally the term ‘ideology’ was established by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in The Communist Manifesto (1848), describing the way in which the ruling class (or bourgeoisie) used their power to distort the economic structures (the profound inequalities of capitalist society) until they appear completely natural to the exploited working class (proletariat). According to them, all social institutions, the government, the law and also the media construct a similarly distorted view of the world. (cf. Creeber 2006: 44f.)

As this type of social critique was also at the heart of structuralism and semiotics, Roland Barthe incorporated these notions of ideology in Mythologies (1973), his famous semiotic account of culture, arguing that myth is simply the illusion by which ideology is presented to the world as natural (cf. 1973: 142).

Similarly these ideas have influenced structuralist narrative theory. Tzvetan Todorov (1977) argued that narrative structures are not inherently radical or conservative, but they are likely to be used to perpetuate the ideological status quo. So while “the general structure of storytelling (order – disorder – order restored) implicitly suggests that things should and will always remain as they are, the fictional happy endings, deeply rooted in our narrative tradition, imply
that our society is fair and just and that “good will always triumph over evil”. (Creeber 2006: 47).

Furthermore narrative theory claims, that already the structures, by which we make sense of the world around us, are inherently ideological. We do not come to understand the world innocently, we are rather taught from early childhood on to see it through a system of opposites. In our Western cultural background this might include good vs. bad, man vs. woman, white vs. black, order vs. chaos, ... As these binary opposites present and normalize the ideas of the dominant class, they are not defined equally, but hierarchically, whereas the second term is usually considered as a corruption of the first. (cf. Creeber 2006: 46)

Contemporary television scholars try to understand, what role TV plays in maintaining the ideological power of the leading class. E.g. the U.S. media coverage on the Iraq war showed, how television news are able to naturalize the dominant ideology, constructing images of the political world and the cultural ‘other’, based on these learned structures and the opposition ‘us’ versus ‘them’, ‘West’ versus ‘East’. Table 1.2 shows a list of binary oppositions revealing the implications of U.S. media coverage and representation of the Iraq War.

So, considering the learned structures and the examples above, all our narratives are inevitably biased by our projections of good and evil. How many times have Native Americans been described as blood-thirsty and cunning savages, or how often are the antagonists of contemporary U.S. film productions of Muslim, Russian, Asian, Mexican or Afro-American background?

Also stereotyping is a form of creating and establishing distorted myths about different national, social and racial groups. Common stereotypes like the black mugger, the Asian shop keeper, the dull blond, the nagging wife and the Islamic terrorist, simplify and reduce individual characteristics of a certain group into social and ideological clichés. (cf. Creeber 2006: 47)

According to Creeber, television as medium is particularly susceptible to the use of stereotypes, as it needs to establish characters as fast as possible, otherwise the viewers lose interest and zap to other programs. Thus particularly short time formats, like sitcoms, but also TV ads tend to make heavy use of stereotypes. (cf. 2006: 47f.)

Even if most of them appear harmless, they split society into ‘us’ and ‘them’ and it is usually quite obvious, who has done the stereotyping and who has been

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WE</th>
<th>THEY</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Our missiles cause ...</td>
<td>Their missiles cause ...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We ...</td>
<td>They ...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Precision bomb</td>
<td>Fire widely at anything in the skies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George Bush is ...</td>
<td>Saddam Hussein is ...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At peace with himself</td>
<td>Demented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resolute</td>
<td>Defiant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statesmanlike</td>
<td>An evil tyrant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assured</td>
<td>A crackpot monster</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Table 1.2: Examples of U.S. media coverage of Iraq War cited by Lacey (2000: 69).
stereotyped. E.g. TV tends to portray gay or lesbian characters as queer and ridiculous, which is a quite subtle attempt of the dominant culture to keep a ‘minority’ group subordinate. (cf. Creeber 2006: 47f.)

An ideological approach to any television programme involves such issues of representation and the awareness that TV doesn’t innocently reflect the world. Not only factual TV formats such as news or documentaries are a ‘reliable’ source of political bias, also less politically motivated programmes such as sitcoms, soaps, reality TV and action films naturalize ideology. “They rather re-present reality i.e. they construct and articulate it from a particular perspective,...” (Creeber 2006: 48) and equally the viewer receives and interprets it in a certain way.

Emphasizing the importance of audience studies, Stuart Hall’s ground-breaking article ‘Encoding and Decoding Television Discourse’ (1980) describes the polysemic quality of TV texts, analyzing how they can be read in different ways. Arguing that there is always a dominant reading of a programme, which means, that the majority of viewers accept the implied world view, Hall claims that their values were constructed by the powerful influence of mass culture. (cf. Creeber 2006: 49,78)

But he also emphasized that particularly viewers, placed at the social margins can resist this ’encoded’ interpretation and develop ’negotiated or oppositional decodings’. Despite stressing, how active audiences could be in reading a programme, Hall’s notion of the ‘preferred reading’ clearly suggests that a dominant ideology is at work. (cf. Creeber 2006: 50)

In the post-structuralist era any firm and stable relationship between signifier and the signified was called into question. Schroder claimed that “the text itself has no existence, no life, and therefore no quality until it is deciphered by an individual and triggers the meaning potential carried by this individual”. (1992: 207)

After the clear-cut binary oppositions of the Cold War, issues of identity rose in their importance and race, class and gender ‘wars’ came up. Originating in Socio-linguistics, Discourse Analysis is particularly associated with investigating the ways “different ‘discourses’ influence the social production of meaning”. (Creeber 2006: 50). Michel Foucault argued that in every society at any time, there are a number of different ’discourses’ at work, which actively construct our reality by fixing meaning. These ’discourses’ might include legal, educational, sexual, journalistic or popular discourses, such as pop-music, slang, regional dialects, .... and although they are ideologically colored and do fix meaning, discourse theory does not see them as completely dominant or eternal. (cf. Creeber 2006: 50)

But instead of trying to understand the one and only truth of things, Foucault was much more interested in historicizing “the different kinds of truth, knowledge, rationality and reason that had developed in cultures”. (Danaher 2000: 6) E.g. by analyzing how the discourse and thus also the definitions of sanity, insanity, good and evil have changed over the years, he demonstrated how legal, medical and even sexual discourses have influenced the way crime, illness and sexual deviancy have been treated. (cf.Creeber 2006: 50)

Today television scholars have come to the conclusion, that viewers’ readings can only be understood by analyzing their social and ethnographic background, studying the institutional context the production, reception, as well as the distribution of television programmes. Considering TV’s implicitly ideological nature
and the strong cultural and economic influence of the West, the worldwide pro-
gramming of U.S. multimedia conglomerates like Time Warner or the Murdoch
News Group inevitably raises serious concerns about ideological indoctrination
and cultural loss. Many people perceive this U.S. dominance on the TV sector
as “a one-way traffic, overwhelming any local product”. (Creeber 2006: 75)

Barbara Villez from the University of Paris brings an eye-opening example,
how vastly influential the medium is. The law professor criticizes that watching
the U.S. law series like Ally McBeal or Boston Legal, which in fact have little
to do with real court-routine, has shaped her students’ understanding of the
American legal system. In addition she realized, that even her French students
were frequently surprised that their own legal system differs so radically from
what they had ‘learned’ on TV. (cf. McCabe, Akass 2007: 15)

But TV as medium is also cutting edge, investigating and sometimes resist-
ing, subverting, or ridiculing traditional ideologies, - of course only to establish
new ones. Particularly binary oppositions and the concept of the ‘Other’ are
nowadays frequently inverted.

In 1975 Laura Mulvey argued in her article ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative
Cinema’, that patriarchal society had constructed the cinematic gaze according
masculine desires, criticizing that pleasure in looking had been split between
active/male and passive/female. Reflecting the dominant structures, the male
gaze projected its fantasy on to the female figure, which was ideally passive,
young, beautiful and styled accordingly. (cf. 1975: 19) But this was not only
true for the cinematic gaze, also traditional film dialogue followed these opposi-
tions and the audience, men just as women, were obviously willing to buy into
these projections, when entering the cinema.

In his book Television Culture (1987) John Fiske was one of the first to
argue against traditional readings of Madonna’s music videos, claiming that
she parodied patriarchal notions of femininity by continuing and playing on the
sexual objectification of women, using her body as a signifier of resistance. (cf.
Fiske 1987: 39)

Similarly Mary Ellen Brown suggested in Soap Opera and Women’s Talk:
The Pleasure of Resistance, that women’s genres, such as soaps with their female
spectatorship and playful discussions give women their voice, portraying them
in a different way and offering modes of discourse and resistance to dominant
patriarchal ideology. (cf. Brown 1994: 2)

E.g. In Sex and the City four female heroines, talk freely and frankly about
relationships and their sexual desires, making fun about men and their sexual
shortcomings, which contributes to a new independent and more expressive
notion of urban single women. (cf. Creeber 2006: 54f.) Opposing traditional
images of passive women as sex-objects, styled only to satisfy the male gaze, the
series uses all possible channels (character constellation, plot development, cos-
tume, mise-en-scène, narrative style and witty dialogue) to create a new image
of active, strong, and self-confident women, celebrating their consumerism and
fashion awareness as an important symbol and means of female self-expression.
(cf. Creeber 2004: 146)

Clearly targeted at urban middle/upper-class women, the series features
female characters, who do not define themselves through their men or fall into
despair, because they are over forty and single. Having lots of affairs, they are
nevertheless searching for ‘Mr. Right’, and their falling in and out of love gives
the series also a chance to explore different types of male characters.
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION TO TELEVISION STUDIES

Remaining true to their female audience and inverting traditional gender representations, *Sex and the City* tends to portray men in sexist ways. So, for example, Carrie and her friends frequently address their lovers by titles such as Mr. Big, Mr. Pussy, Groovy Guy, Mr. Marvellous and Artist Guy, while their real names are never mentioned. Coming up to their nicknames, most of them turn out to be shallow, immature, narcissistic, freaks, liars, repressed porn-obsessed, married, profoundly ‘unstylish’, and “emotionally inadequate for these four surprisingly strong, ... and financially solvent women”. (Creeber 2004: 146)

1.3 Television Aesthetics

Today we live in a highly mediatized world, in order to be considered significant, an issue, a person or an event have to pass through the media. Television with its implicit truth claim, its intimacy, and its immediacy, broadcasting directly into people’s living rooms, is most important in this process. According to Marshall McLuhan, TV has created a new form of society, ‘the global village’, in which citizens all over the world share the same TV culture and thus the same understanding and instant awareness of certain issues and events, which bridges time and space. (cf. Creeber 2006: 14)

According to Glen Creeber, TV aesthetics address the peculiarities of television and

... how it helps to construct the world of which it is a part. ... It tries to define what is specific about television as a medium. It examines the technological set-up of TV, the feel of its images and sounds, the determining way in which it is received and used, the distinctive ways in which it is received and used, the distinctive nature of its texts, how it creates and organizes meaning. (2006: 13)

Dealing with the experience of watching TV and the fragmented and serial quality of TV programs, in his book *Television: Technology and Cultural Forms* (1974) Raymond Williams introduced the term ‘flow’ to characterize the seemingly endless stream of films, commercial breaks, series, newscasts, and film previews, which are offered on both, single channels and on the totality of channels. Describing his first experience with American TV he writes:

I began watching a film and first had some difficulty in adjusting to a much greater frequency of commercial ‘breaks’. Yet it was a minor problem compared to what eventually happened. Two other films, which were to be shown on the same channel on other nights, began to be inserted as trailers. A crime in San Francisco (the subject of the original film) began to operate in an extraordinary counterpoint not only with the deodorant and cereal commercials, but with a romance in Paris and the eruption of a prehistoric monster who laid waste New York. (Williams 1974: 91f.)

Comparing a usual evening’s viewing to “having read two plays, three newspapers, three or four magazines, ... having been to a variety show, a lecture and a football match” he says, though the experience was, of course, a different one, TV somehow unified them all. (Williams 1974: 95)
Also John Ellis stresses the fragmentary and incomplete nature of TV, contrasting it with the cinema experience. He describes the movie experience as “being swept away by an external force”, pointing at the spectators’ fixated ‘gaze’ directed at the cinema screen, and modern cinemas are designed to offer ideal conditions for it. Huge dark halls, anonymity, oversized screens and sophisticated sound systems produce a typical atmosphere, which meets with a ritualized audience’s behavior. (cf. Creeber 2006: 16)

Observing viewers’ ‘glance’ at the small screen, Ellis compares watching TV to “cooly regarding the river at a distance”, being now and then distracted by what happens in the immediate surroundings. According to him, as opposed to movies, which are usually self-contained, TV programs consist of 5 minutes segments with a high degree of internal cohesion, but less linear connection with each other. TV’s mix of film segments, commercials, trailers, the enormous sum of competing channels, its 24 hours availability and its living space surroundings inevitably leads to a reduced viewer concentration among the TV audience. (cf. Creeber 2006: 16f.)

Facing this problem, program directors and producers employ music, vocal cues, visual and sound effects to structure their program and keep the viewer’s attention. Recent developments in large screen and Dolby Surround technology support this strategy, attempting to transform living rooms into home cinemas. Still they cannot make up for the fragmented television program and also the environment stays the same.

The schedule represents the underlying organization of television’s endless flow of fragmentary pieces. It provides the rhythm for the flow, structuring the program into blocks of time, establishing a hierarchy among the single segments as well as a pattern of repetition of these formats. According to Ellis, scheduling is the hidden determinant for all TV productions, and of course audience reception studies play an important role in it. (cf. Ellis 2000: 130ff.)

Considering the daily, weekly and seasonal schedule it can easily be observed that television tries to adjust its program to everyday life, offering a variety of material fitted into each part of day, week and year. (cf. Creeber 2006: 19) From morning news and breakfast TV to midday magazine, to children’s and teens’ program in the afternoon (mainly sitcoms, talk shows, soaps and diverse magazine and reality TV formats), to evening news, primetime series, blockbusters and late night program for adults only, television is trying to entertain us 24 hours a day.

Examining the aesthetics of broadcast television, Creeber argues that its immediacy is based on a sense of liveness and its imitation of our daily routine, alternating regular program elements with live coverage of sports events and permanent news flashes transmitted directly into our living room. (2006: 19)

Lately also different types of casting and game shows (e.g. Star Search, Americas Next Top Model, America’s Best Dance Crew, The Bachelor, ...) play on this live factor. Similarly various reality TV formats like Cops, Big Brother, The Osbournes, and Farmer wants a Wife add to this sense of immediacy, which is often enforced by audience telephone voting or live interviews, giving the viewer the chance to participate in the show.
1.4 Television Market and Industry

Nowadays program makers and TV productions are confronted with a highly competitive international market. Multi-channel television and the cable revolution in combination with new satellite transmission and digital technology have changed the media landscape forever. TV companies merged to multinational conglomerates and broadcast went from local to national to global. (cf. McCabe, Akass 2007: 5)

Obeying the law of consumer demand and satisfaction, the growing international audience gave rise to hundreds of new channels, ranging from superstations to smaller, sometimes subscription based channels specializing in niche entertainments (cf. McCabe, Akass 2007: 5). Focusing on certain issues or specific formats, like newscasts, documentaries, movies, series, travel magazines, tele-shopping, sports, music, children’s program, ... they contributed to a diversification of the TV market and a fragmentation of the audience.

U.S. companies have pioneered the international TV market, which laid the foundation stone for its role as global player today. Networks all over the world are now buying American programs in order to brand their channels. Being the biggest exporter of television and movies, the USA controls over 70 per cent of the market, which makes it hard for foreign competitors to survive. (cf. McCabe, Akass 2007: 111)

Describing the U.S. media landscape, Dermot Horan, Director of Broadcast and Acquisition for RTÉ, the Irish public broadcaster, writes that it is basically made up of six major companies, which are familiar to almost everybody who owns a TV-set. Warner Bros, Disney, NBC Universal, Sony, Twentieth Century Fox and CBS Paramount produce the vast majority of movies and cable series currently aired all over the world. (cf. McCabe, Akass 2007: 111)

Also the five main U.S. networks are owned by these concerns, CBS is part of CBS Paramount, ABC belongs to Disney, NBC is owned by NBC Universal, Fox by Twentieth Century Fox, and the CW Television Network is co-owned by Warner Bros and CBS Paramount. Finally, also the major cable-broadcasters, like HBO, TNT and Showtime, are part of these conglomerates and swallowing smaller independent companies like e.g. Turner, New World and MTM, Horan claims that the six majors leave foreign networks little choice as to where and on what terms they will buy U.S. products. (cf. McCabe, Akass 2007: 112)

In order to pass on as much material as possible, they sell their products only in huge packages, combining successful movies with a poor list of series or vice versa. Since box office hit-series like *Desperate Housewives, Lost*, and *CSI* have been sold to numerous networks worldwide, studios are willing to invest much more money in series, as they might turn into a good substitute revenue, helping them to survive bad movie years. (cf. McCabe, Akass 2007: 111f.)

Smaller channels, which are unable to compete for the new and thus particularly expensive U.S. programs, are offered second, third or fourth runs of the product. This strategy allows distributors to maximize their profits by selling their movies and series repeatedly to several channels over several years. According to Horan, the U.S. majors usually combine cheaper material like old movies, series and documentaries with blockbusters, frequently forcing large movie and television libraries upon luckless buyers. Still, he admits that the cheap extra stuff might prove a useful filler for the off-peak program, especially during day time and late-night hours, when viewing figures are low. (cf. McCabe, Akass
This form of mass production and packaging is typical for liberal markets, making it easy for big players and difficult for smaller companies, which simply lack the capacity to produce or buy such film volumes at such prices. While some of them try to specialize in niches, others get swallowed by the majors or put out of business.

Every year in May the U.S. networks announce their schedules for the upcoming season and about 1500 international buyers, among them also Dermot Horan, arrive in Los Angeles to watch the pilots of the chosen series. Usually the screenings last up to seven days and buyers try to figure out the hot shows. Once they are ordered, they will be subtitled or translated and further seasons will be planned. (cf. McCabe, Akass 2007: 116)

Considering the prestige and stylishness attached to American film products, Horan claims that a strong U.S. series can last up to 22 weeks and “form the backbone of a schedule”, providing a broadcaster with a signature show and mask other more mediocre programming of the channel (cf. McCabe, Akass 2007: 114).

Eventhough these series are extremely expensive, in combination with extensive marketing they can help a channel to build up a certain image. Usually in prime time position they fill a program slot up to six months. Thus new hit-series like *Lost* and *24* have been introduced by extensive on-air promotion, poster campaigns, and cinema ads. For example Channel 4 and Sky One spent each about 1.5 million pound on advertising their exclusive UK screening of *Lost* and *24*. (cf. McCabe, Akass 2007: 115)

When networks select new series for branding, they usually pay special attention to their ability “to give the channel an image of quality and being ahead of the competition”. Their potential to build up a lasting viewing community depends heavily on opinion leaders and its impact on so called “early adopters”, who tell their peers about a hot new show. According to Horan, “a channel will gain or lose its reputation over a few series, and long-running U.S. series are among the most important”. (McCabe, Akass 2007: 115)

Successful series, that immediately come to mind are *Sex and the City*, *Friends*, *Desperate Housewives*, *CSI*, *Lost*, *24*, *Emergency Room*, *The Simpsons*, *Six Feet Under*, *The Sopranos*, ... Appealing to huge international audiences they give a good return to their broadcasters, thus Dermot Horan calls these shows “the lifeblood of the major U.S. distributors”. (McCabe, Akass 2007: 116)

### 1.5 The Current Debate on 'Quality' TV

After the medium had changed very little since the 1950s, the cable revolution and satellite technology confronted program makers and executives with a huge demographically and culturally diverse audience. In addition home-video industry and later DVDs and digital TV box sets allowed viewers to watch their favorite episodes whenever and as often as they wanted.

Knowing that their work would be scrutinized by people all over the world, producers developed a new form of TV aesthetics. In 1981 first 'quality' TV shows like *Hill Street Blues* and *St. Elsewhere* emerged. These were very specialized offerings on American broadcast networks, which clearly distinguished
themselves from common series like *Trapper John*, *Knight Rider*, and *MacGyver*, displaying more liberal values. (cf. McCabe, Akass 2007: 17)

During the 1990s hit series like *NYPD Blue* and *Emergency Room* standardized the new ‘quality’ formula and by the turn of the century it had spread like a virus from networks to cable channels, - both pay and basic, which became the test kitchens for this innovative genre; and in 2000 ‘quality’ was busting out all over U.S. television. (cf. McCabe, Akass 2007: 17f.)

Especially HBO outdid their network counterparts, presenting their ‘quality’ shows as the highest artistic achievement in the medium, advertising ”It’s not TV, it’s HBO”. Indeed their series went beyond anything imaginable in the old network era, introducing a new complexity in style, content, narrative and language, foregrounding creative impulse as well as artistic vision. (cf. McCabe, Akass 2007: 18)

To the U.S. television industry as

a community of profit-minded capitalists interested in 'delivering' audiences and not texts, the term 'quality' describes the demographics of the audience. Delivering a quality audience means delivering whatever demographic advertisers seek, or in the case of premium cable, attracting an audience with enough disposable income to pay extra for TV. (McCabe, Akass 2007: 147)

Similarly, to networks as well as pay cable services, subscriber numbers, audience studies and viewer ratings such as e.g. Nielsen Ratings are a kind of bible, deciding which programmes will be continued, which will be cancelled, and which will be moved to another time slot.

Nielsen ratings are audience measurement systems developed by Nielsen Media Research, which have become the most important source of market analysis in the television industry around the world. Being able to determine a programme’s audience size and its socio-demographic composition in the United States, it also provides detailed information about viewing habits and the popularity of certain formats or particular shows. (cf. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nielsen_Ratings; June 2, 2010)

With the help of extensive audience inquiries, statistics and Set Meters (small devices connected to TV sets in selected homes) Nielsen Media Research gathers data on a minute to minute basis, observing and recording exactly when viewers turn on or off their TV and in what moments they switch to other channels, what programmes they watch regularly and so on. (cf. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nielsen_Ratings; June 2, 2010)

While networks with their broad audience were bound by federal regulations of the FCC (Federal Communication Commission) and used to stick to 'the least offensive' programming, especially subscription-based cable channels were free to do whatever they wanted, as long as they appealed to their target audience. Being much more flexible in adapting to what programme ratings said, they were among the first to specialize in serial entertainment. (cf. McCabe, Akass 2007: 18f.)

Statistical figures had made them aware that the movies, which made up a huge and expensive part of their program, had already been seen in the cinema or watched on video cassette, and were thus no longer attractive to their viewers. So cable channels started to produce individualized and cutting-edge series for
their selected audience, challenging the ‘quality’ market with an even more sophisticated program. (cf. McCabe, Akass 2007: 18f.)

While traditional shows like Columbo or Walker, Texas Ranger and Nash Bridges slowly disappeared, Sex and the City, CSI, Six Feet Under, Ally McBeal, and The X-Files took over, mixing older formats, tragedy and comedy, and introducing new aesthetics and production practices as well as four-letter words, sexual content and nudity. (cf. McCabe, Akass 2007: 117).

Robert J. Thompson and many other TV scholars agree that the precise definition of ‘quality TV’ was elusive right from the start, though we knew it when we saw it. These shows were generic mongrels, often scrambling and recombining traditional TV formulas in unexpected ways. They had literary and cinematic ambitions beyond what we had seen before and they employed complex and sophisticated serialized narratives and inter-series ‘mythologies’. (McCabe, Akass 2007: 19)

In his book Television’s Second Golden Age, Thompson describes this new format, arguing, ‘that it is best defined by what it is not, “It is not regular” TV’. (1996: 13)

Academics have long been struggling with the term ‘quality’, Charlotte Brundson argues, that the term ‘quality’ always involves issues of power and ideology, as well as discourses of judgment. The central question is what is quality, considering our present cultural zeitgeist, and who judges? Given the transient nature of the medium and its relative novelty and appeal to the masses, she states that debates on taste and judgment are inevitably handicapped. (cf. 1990a: 29f.)

While British TV scholars try to neglect subjectivity in their critical evaluations of U.S. ‘quality’ television, American TV Scholars like McAthur, Cardwell, Pool and Lawson admit, that discourse of TV and critical judgement always involve personal opinion, different notions of taste and subjective expectations. (cf. McCabe, Akass 2007: 4)

Robin Nelson, author of TV Drama in Transition (1997), claims that similarly to changes in social cultural and industrial discourses, also criteria for evaluating TV series have changed. Arguing that “notions of quality are an open narrative of the broad cultural and institutional context of the evaluation and the valuer, rather than a closed resolution answering the question of worth for all time” he concludes that “the quality debate is an ever-changing history”. (cited in McCabe, Akass 2007: 4)

In her essay on The West Wing, Christina Lane, Assistant Professor in film studies at the University of Miami, was one of the first scholars, who spoke of ‘quality’ TV as a set of conventions and stylistic features. Still putting the word ‘quality’ in inverted commas, following the predominant tendency among TV scholars, she presents it as worthy of critical attention, depicting it as good fiction. (cf. McCabe, Akass 2007: 24)

Sarah Cardwell, Senior Lecturer in Television Studies at the University of Kent, tries to define ‘quality’ TV by answering the basic question “What is good TV?”. Referring to the experience and reaction triggered in the viewer, she concludes, that it is good television if we ‘experience it positively’ because we feel something towards it. Even if viewed repeatedly, she claims that it must be inspiring, stimulating, entertaining, exciting, original and offer certain moral
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and ideological qualities as well as textual features, which allow identification and sustain repeated viewing. (cf. McCabe, Akass 2007: 31)

Considering the viewing figures of contemporary U.S. 'quality' TV series, she states that they are obviously able to exhibit certain characteristics, which contribute to a better resonance among viewers (cf. McCabe, Akass 2007: 26ff.) But she also writes

It is not that a particular pace, or style of camerawork, or level of detail in the mise-en-scène, or type of performance, or particular set of themes, make a programme good, - though these things may make it 'quality' television, but that the way in which these things are integrated can create a coherent whole that has stylistic integrity. (McCabe, Akass 2007: 30)

Similarly David Bianculli, film critic for more than 30 years, states that a show worthy of the 'quality' compliment must be complex, surprising and 'different' enough to capture his attention fully and keep him from doing paperwork alongside. (cf. McCabe, Akass 2007: 37)

Dermot Horan provided an example, analyzing what makes 'quality' shows stand out from the crowd and garner international success. In 1994 Warner Bros launched their new medical series ER (Emergency Room) and CBS countered with Chicago Hope. Both shows had strong pilots, but the latter stuck to traditional production techniques, while “ER, on the other hand, brought emergency medicine into the living room, with an intensity and pace, never seen before in a television drama”. (McCabe, Akass 2007: 116)

Dialogue and camera were fast and furious; in acute medical situations several characters were talking or shouting excitedly at the same time, so that it was difficult to understand what the doctors were saying. A huge team of medical advisors, detailed research and observation of real emergency cases, realistic mise-en-scène and a well selected cast gave ER a special authenticity. While Chicago Hope remained a mediocre success, ER became a “global phenomenon”, lasting for over 13 seasons and launching movie stars like George Clooney and breaking records for the amounts, channels would pay for it. (cf. McCabe, Akass 2007: 116)

Still, many scholars deny such 'quality' shows the status of a new genre, although some like e.g. Sarah Cardwell, agree that there is indeed “a common awareness of continuities within this group of programmes”. (McCabe, Akass 2007: 25) Robert J. Thompson goes even one step further claiming that “'quality' drama has (already) become a genre in itself, complete with its own set of formulaic characteristics”. (Thompson 1996: 16)

In his book Television’s Second Golden Age, he lays down criteria for inclusion in this genre, stating that

• American 'quality' TV breaks the rules of traditional television,
• its aesthetics are frequently influenced from other fields than television,
• it mixes old formats to create new ones
• it attracts blue-chip audience,
• it uses ensemble casts,
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- it features multiple overlapping plot lines,
- it comprises cultural and political criticism and aims to enlighten,

[...] (cf. Thompson 1996: 12ff.)

1.6 Series’ Triumph over Single Drama

Today, increasing budgets and modern production techniques like e.g. computer animation and special effects allow TV series to compete with expensive Hollywood movies. In addition wide-screen plasma and HD (high-definition) TV sets, as well as Dolby-Surround sound systems have set new standards for "small-screen fiction." (cf. McCabe, Akass 2007: 8).

In particular serialized formats like e.g. prime-time series, talk shows, soaps and reality shows are spreading quickly, while many film fans complain that single drama slowly disappears from the small screen.

Similar to other globalized markets, also the TV business is based on economic principles furthering mass production, which is the only possible answer to the ever increasing demand, triggered by the constantly growing number of TV networks and viewers worldwide. Considering the usual primetime program above, it is obvious, that U.S. series dominate even Central European primetime program.

While originally television was considered the little brother of cinema, offering reruns of movies or imitating them in small screen drama, TV producers have developed their own formats and styles. Sharing a new awareness of the environment of television, both on the international market and at home, they have created a new type of series which offer a much greater efficiency and flexibility, than any other format.

Out of a TV producer’s perspective, series are much cheaper to produce, as long-term contracts with script writers, production teams and actors are usually less expensive. Similarly settings, issues, camera style, sound design and many other structures can be exploited over several seasons, depending on the success of the program. Thus potential hit series offer well paid long term projects and are thus much more profitable than single drama productions.

Also from a program maker’s point of view they present a regular and stable element of a channel’s program. Due to their structure they are easy to schedule, they can be broadcasted on a weekly or a daily basis or used to fill single program gaps. Once successfully introduced series can last up to 10 seasons or more, and they usually “build and attain far better ratings than single dramas” (Creeber 2004: 2), gathering a regular viewer community, offering people something to share and talk about.

Flourishing in form of drama series, serials and soaps, the serialized narrative with its inherent dynamics has proved to be uniquely suited for the small screen. Being successfully adapted by natural history television (Big Cat Weekly BBC 2004) or television advertising (Nestlé and Red Bull series) serialization is one of the major trends, observed by contemporary television scholars. (cf. Creeber 2004: 3f.)

Also the movie has been infected by this trend, blockbusters like The Lord of the Rings (Jackson, 2000-3), Harry Potter (Columbus, 200-), Star Wars (Lucas, 1997-), and Kill Bill (Tarantino, 2003-4) have been serialized, usually with
cliffhangers at the end of each part. (cf. Creeber 2004: 3f.) But even TV series themselves seem to conquer the cinemas. More and more contemporary movies are film adaptations of successful TV shows like e.g. *Sex and the City, Star Trek,* or comic series like *The Simpsons,* or *Spiderman,* which of course ask for sequels.

While single dramas tend to have a clearly defined narrative trajectory, serialized formats are able to construct open narrative forms and delay resolutions. Multiplying story lines and interweaving them to complex narratives, TV producers try to imitate reality, “examining human and social issues in a more ‘authentic’ manner”. (Creeber 2004: 4) Allowing different story lines to develop at varying pace, resolving single ones and leaving others without conclusion, Robin Nelson, author of *TV Drama in Transition* argues, that this form of ‘flexi-narrative’ is better suited to reveal “the complexity, ambiguity and lack of closure” of everyday life. (1997: 38)

Similar to soap opera, series’ episodic nature and long-form give screen writers time to introduce and develop psychologically complex characters. While the movie and single drama genre force authors and editors to present their stories and characters within the predominant 90 minutes film, serialized genres can go on "forever", allowing room for multi-narrative strands and subplot digressions “and we can see characters age and develop both physically and narratively in a way that even Wagner’s longest operas and Dickens’ most extended novels didn’t allow”, (Thompson 1996: 32) although already Dickens serialized his complex and dense novels, publishing them in monthly and weekly magazines.

This almost unlimited temporary dimension allows series to give voice to an increased number of perspectives. With their daily or weekly recurrence, the format allows the viewer to familiarize and identify with the different characters and observe their psychological struggles and development over a long period, establishing a specific narrative and viewing practice, which exploits its extended and interrupted construction of time. (cf. Creeber 2004: 6f.) Building up and bringing back a regular audience each week, series have become the most lucrative and stabilizing format for TV networks.

In order to analyze the structure and style of modern long-form drama, it is important to look at its roots and narrative structure. Observing a gradual hybridization of small screen formats, Glen Creeber still distinguishes between three major types, namely soap opera, series and serials, which are gradually merging. (cf. 2004: 8)

- Soap opera, is a continuous serialized drama which revolves around “the domestic and intimate lives of a small community that explicitly resists narrative closure”(2004: 8). Analyzing soap operas, and their ability to establish viewer communities, Horace Newcomb writes that the genre’s two most important elements are intimacy and continuity, as the serial format allows much greater audience involvement, “a sense of becoming a part of the lives and actions of the characters they see”. (1974: 253)

Created by William J. Bell and Lee Phillip Bell for CBS, *The Bold and the Beautiful* (1978-) has become one of the most successful soap operas world wide. With more than 5500 episodes the program has been broadcasted in 130 countries, reaching an estimated audience of 26 million viewers world wide. As of 2010, it continues to hold on to the second place position in weekly Nielsen Ratings.
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- Traditional series narrate continuous stories over a number of self-contained episodes, usually involving the same settings and a fixed set of key characters as well as temporary characters sometimes acted by guest stars. Due to their narrative conclusion, episodes within one season can ideally be broadcast in any order. (cf. Creeber 2004: 8) Still in his book Visible Fictions John Ellis claims that “series imply the form of the dilemma rather than that of resolution and closure”. (1982: 154)

Star Trek (CBS, Paramount Pictures 1966-2005), originally created by Gene Roddenberry is an example of a particularly well received traditional series. With 725 episodes and 11 movie spin-offs, Star Trek has become THE prototype of modern science-fiction series, launching stars like William Shatner (Captain Kirk) and Leonard Nimoy (Mr. Spock) and creating a world wide fan community. (cf. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Star_Trek; June 4, 2010)

- Traditional serials dramatize slowly unfolding stories over several episodes and seasons, resisting narrative conclusion until the final installment. (cf. Creeber 2004: 8) In her article ‘Theory and Television’ Sarah Kozloff states, that in their form and structure, they are similar to serialized victorian novels, while series could be rather compared to short story anthologies. (cf. 1992: 90f.)

24 (Fox, 2001-) is an explicit example of a modern serial, communicating its limited trajectory already in the title. The serial is known for its mimicking of real time, with each of its 8 seasons running over exactly twenty-four hours, featuring twenty-four episodes of 60 minutes, with a constant progress towards narrative conclusion, reached at the end of each season. (cf. Creeber 2004: 10)

Observing the contemporary genre break down between the serial and series, Graeme Turner writes that “today there are elements of serial in many of what the industry would regard as series: U.S. sitcoms such as Friends, hospital dramas like Emergency Room, or cop shows such as NYPD Blue” mix both formats. Especially the self-contained episodic narration of series seems to give way to serials’ continuing story lines, just as series’ thematic focus seems to shift towards characters’ private lives, which is typical for soaps. (cf. 2001: 6)

Also Glen Creeber claims that genre characteristics need to be redefined, taking into account the increasing hybridity and flexibility of contemporary serialized formats, which in their loosely defined narrative structure tend to borrow from various styles and genres, offering a new way of dramatizing our contemporary world. (cf. 2004: 12)

So, e.g. traditional sitcoms like Married...with Children (FOX 1987-97), The Cosby Show (NBC 1984-92), Roseanne (ABC 1988-97), The Nanny (CBS 1993-99), Friends (NBC 1994-2004) or Tool Time (ABC 1991-99), used to feature studio atmosphere, live audience or laugh tracks. But after hitting their peak in the 90s, they are now about to be replaced by a new type of more realistic comedy drama.

Still centering on the comic representation of a reduced set of characters in everyday situations (usually a family, a group of friends or colleagues), their
successors like e.g. *Scrubs* (NBC/ABC 2001-10), *Gilmore Girls* (The WB Television Network/The CW Television Network 2000-7), *Ally McBeal* (FOX 1997-2002) or *Malcolm in the Middle* (FOX 2000-6) show a clear tendency to upgrade dramatic action, featuring more elaborate story lines and dialogue, sophisticated humor as well as serious issues, complex characters and character development.

But this new comedy format also establishes realistic mise-en-scène and while the ‘live on stage’ factor and laugh tracks have been eliminated, filmic realization plays an important role. *Scrubs* is one particularly successful example of a contemporary U.S. comedy series, which has been translated into many foreign languages and sold to networks all over the world. Created in 2001 by Bill Lawrence and produced by NBC (and later taken over by ABC), in 2009 the ninth season has been aired. (cf. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scrubs_(TV_series); May 16, 2010)

The show follows the lives and experiences of John Dorian (Zach Braff) and his friends Christopher Turk and Elliot Reid a group of freshmen in their first years at the Sacred Heart teaching hospital. Frequently confronted with odd medical cases, and continually harassed by their sarcastic and narcissistic instructors Dr. Cox and Dr. Kelso (Chief of Medicine), as well as the sadistic janitor, they try to hold on to their idealized notion of the medical profession.

Similarly to other modern ‘quality’ series, Lawrence developed a highly individualized narrative style for *Scrubs*, focusing on the unique point of view of John Dorian, his main character, who usually introduces at the beginning and concludes at the end of episodes, linking the different story lines with his funny voice-overs (off-stage commentaries) and interior monologues. In the middle part, particularly in moments of physical contact, the narrative agency is frequently transferred to other characters’ self-reflective and comic internal monologues. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scrubs_(TV_series); May 16, 2010)

Traditionally sitcoms have been performed and filmed live and without interruption in front of a studio audience, using 3-5 cameras on telescope bars or stands, which move on rolls to capture the scenes from different perspectives. (cf. http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sitcom; May 16, 2010) This method is the best to shoot live events, as it reduces production time and saves money.

But, in order to give his sitcom a more realistic and film-like quality, Lawrence chose the single camera technique, which allows more creativity and precision in camera work and editing. Being well aware that this would raise the costs, he argued that it was the only possibility to realize J.D.’s comical daydreams. (cf. http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scrubs_+_TV_series; May 16, 2010)

Trying to get away from the typical sitcom image, Lawrence also dispenses with canned laughter, shooting in a real medical center and revising the scripts with medical advisors in order to increase the show’s authenticity. Working with unusual camera techniques, fast-paced screenplay and editing, the series’ filmic realization displays much more creativity and variability than traditional sitcoms.

But although Lawrence neglects many traditional genre elements, it is easy to recognize the roots of the show, as its plot and humor are still based on situation comedy, driven by odd and funny characters. However, sitcoms tend to maintain the ‘status quo’ from episode to episode, showing little or no character development, while Scrubs features story lines which sometimes span several episodes, and situations as well as characters change and evolve throughout the seasons.
Other rather traditional elements of the show are slapstick, puns and running gags. Particularly the strange and hostile character of the janitor, who loves to play dirty tricks on staff members, represents a seemingly inexhaustible source of running gags and slapstick scenes involving wet floor, over-polished closed glass doors, contaminated canteen food and dead animals.

After an incident in the first episode the janitor directs his sadistic efforts to J.D., but although the young doctor repeatedly tries to reconcile, he has a certain talent to put his foot in it and thus he gets permanently mobbed by the bad tempered janitor. The man’s name is never mentioned, which symbolizes the general ignorance and lack of appreciation for his person and his work, which is in turn the cause of his frustration and misanthropy. (cf. http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scrubs_(TV_series); May 16, 2010)

Apart from a well selected soundtrack of pop songs, Lawrence supports such comical scenes with special effects, stunts, computer animations and sound effects. A short montage of comic scenes from Scrubs can be watched at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=80-v-PRN1NY&feature=related. Providing an overview of the many different types of humor used in the show (from intertextual allusions and dramatized daydreams, to running gags and simple slapstick), it displays also the highly individualized filmic style of the series.

1.7 Contemporary Dimensions of Film Music

Today music plays an important part in our lives, although we are not always actively listening to it, it surrounds most of us almost all day long. Apart from the many portable music players and and mp3 cellphones for those who like to be their own DJ, mankind is nowadays voluntarily or involuntarily exposed to music. In offices, in elevators, in waiting rooms, rest rooms, stores, restaurants, cars, subways, and other public places as well as in private places, daily life seems to be played out to a soundtrack of pop music. (cf. Creeber 2006: 84)

Despite the fact that music can influence a person’s mood, also different kinds of sensual impressions such as images or feelings, which we have while listening to a certain song, are unconsciously or consciously associated with it. Of course the intensity of these associations depends on a person’s musical talent, but they can cause a memory effect, which puts us back into the same mood, the moment we listen to the same song or type of music again.

To appeal to the elusive 16 to 25-years-old market, TV is trying to take advantage of this memory effect, featuring contemporary pop music in all programmes. (cf. Creeber 2006: 84) No matter if on MTV, in casting shows, live shows, single drama, series, previews or commercial breaks, pop music is used to entertain, to support the message and to provoke or intensify specific moods among the viewers.

Frequently featuring young artists and thus contributing to their international fame, TV plays a central role in the music business offering channels to reach a huge and diverse audience. So, while in earlier times, studios had to pay enormous sums for the composition and production of film music, today they can cast bands and pick out the songs they need.

A well selected soundtrack can add immensely to the popularity of a show and vice versa, one or several songs featured in the series (most likely the theme song, due to its recurrence) might turn into hits. Ideally both concepts pay off
and profit from each others’ success. Attaching the image of song(s) or artist(s) to the overall image of the show, producers have found a further possibility to individualize and promote their product, creating a specific musical style and image for their series.

So while the much smaller budget of traditional series only allowed for a theme melody and a rather reduced repertoire of instrumental background music, contemporary shows draw from a pool of well selected rock, pop, techno and indie songs to support the various scenes and moods of their episodes. E. g. shows like *Scrubs*, *Desperate Housewives* and *Lost*, frequently end with an emotional musical montage, summing up the different themes and plot strands. Comprising songs from one or several seasons, soundtracks have turned out to be a highly lucrative by-product. Usually available in online music stores, they feature famous U.S. artists as well as newcomers, mixing musical genres, new releases with old releases and cover-versions.

*Ally McBeal* (Fox, 1997-2001) was one of the first ‘quality’ series to put a special emphasis on its musical soundtrack, using popular songs to convey the nostalgic, melancholic or euphoric feelings and commenting on them. In certain scenes, the music actually becomes a part of the plot, when one or several characters hear music in their heads, e. g. when they are daydreaming, or when they feel good, take courage, or suffer silently.

In such moments the text is usually spared, while the music takes over, and songs from Perry White, Tina Turner, Al Green and Vonda Shepard express what the characters feel inside. Frequently the fictional outside world does not hear the music and frequently wonders about their strange behavior, while the viewer can hear the song and thus understands their actions.

The Californian singer-songwriter Vonda Shepard was spotted by the show’s producer David E. Kelly who wanted to create a very special and personal musical concept for his series, featuring not only her music, but also her person on the show. So she appeared regularly, playing a musician at the bar, where Ally and her friends used to go for a drink after work. The success of *Ally McBeal* and her regular appearance on TV boosted Vonda Shepard’s popularity and vice versa, which resulted in the release of two soundtracks and two further compilation albums of her songs, which sold well. (cf. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vonda_Shepard; May 6, 2010)

Another example of this new type of co-marketing is the series *Hannah Montana*. Starring Miley Cyrus, the Walt Disney production debuted in 2006, telling the story of a 13-year-old girl living a double life. At day she is Miley Ray Stewart, an average school girl and teeny, but at night she is Hannah Montana, a famous pop star and only her family knows about her secret. (cf. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hannah_Montana; May 6, 2010)

Miley Cyrus was casted at the age of twelve and, although she was the talented daughter of a country singer, she had not yet started a musical career. But, the series became a perfect example of life imitating the arts, as Hanna’s fictional popularity in the series turned into a real fan base among viewers, who wanted to see her perform live on stage and bought her CD albums, making her a celebrity. (cf. http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Miley_Cyrus; May 6, 2010)

Apart from the fact that Disney has made Miley Cyrus a celebrity and one of the richest teenagers in the U.S., the company has also earned an incredible amount of money with the series, the soundtracks, concerts and *Hannah Montana* merchandise products such as clothing, jewellery, apparel, fashion dolls

1.8 Problems of Television Authorship

According to William Goldman, much celebrated for his work *Adventures in the Screen Trade*, during the network era (1950s-1990s) screen writing was ‘shitwork’. In the 80s he criticized the dominant practices of screen production, which removed the stamp of the authors and elevated directors or producers to auteurist status (cf. McCabe, Akass 2007: 177), but in this era also executive producers were struggling with their lack of power, keeping a low public profile. In her book *The Hollywood TV Producer: His Work and his Audience* in 1971, Muriel Cantor wrote “Even when a man owns, creates and produces his own show, the network retains the right to final approval of scripts, casts and other creative and administrative matters.” (1971: 9)

For example in the case of *Star Trek* (1966-2005), there have been a great number of producers and writers at work, which resulted in several contrasting perspectives on how and by whom the phenomenon was started, but in most of them Gene Roddenberry was the central figure and recognizable authorial name. (cf. McCabe, Akass 2007: 174)

Still Herb Solow, the executive producer of *Star Trek: The Original Series*, which was sold to NBC in 1966, claims that Roddenberry played only a minor role in the creation of the *Star Trek* myth, spending more time promoting himself than the show, while a team of writers did his job. Only 15 of his story ideas were used in the series and even William Shatner (Captain Kirk) supported Solow’s critique. However, for the majority of fans, Roddenberry is the ‘father’ of *Star Trek*. (cf. McCabe, Akass 2007: 174f.)

Rick Berman, who took over the role of executive producer after Gene Roddenberry’s death, was one of the first to stress the importance of authors for a series’ success. Being asked, what would be the biggest problem in keeping the show going, he answered:

> The biggest problem that we have is writers. It is very very difficult to write *Star Trek*. You can get writers to come in here, who are top writers of television, top writers of feature film, playwrights. And the odds are one in 20 of them will be able to write this show ...
> We’re always getting new writers and most of them don’t make up.
> (Interview January 2002 cited in McCabe, Akass 2007: 175)

Berman’s words proved true and the writer problem on *Star Trek* was never really solved. So the series’ viewing figures declined steadily until it was cancelled in 2005. (cf. http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Star_Trek; June 2, 2010)

According to John Rash, Professor of Communications at the University of Minnesota “All great shows flow from the pen of a writer.” (cited in Harris 2006: 36), and recently also American broadcasters seem to emphasize authoring to distinguish their series from ‘regular’ TV. Since the cable revolution introduced the post-network era (1990s-), executive producers as well as authors have achieved a new creative freedom and public prominence. Respecting and approving these people as a crucial and precious source of raw material and cultural value, contemporary quality TV have contributed to the rising prestige of their profession. (cf. McCabe, Akass 2007: 177)
In an ever-changing multi-network surrounding, the names of creative people such as writers and producers turned out to be more suitable to attach an individual style, and authenticity to a show. Using the author as a brand-label of exclusivity, the writer-producer cooperation is frequently presented as a guaranty for quality. (cf. McCabe, Akass 2007: 9)

Michele Hilmes, author of *Only Connect: A Cultural History of Broadcasting in the United States* writes about Steven Bochco, the famous creator, co-author and producer of hit series like *Dallas, Columbo, Hill Street Blues, L.A. Law, NYPD Blue*: “As one of television’s premier auteurs in a fragmented business that provided few forms of continuity, his name had begun to mean more in terms of genre, quality, style and audience than did the name of the network his shows appeared on.” (2002: 312)

Film previews, interviews, modern ‘Making of’ documentaries and backstage production narratives like e.g. *Inside Star Trek: The Real Story* (Solow 1999) are nowadays common by-products of shows, designed to promote the product, actors, writers and producers by shedding light on their craftsmanship and the process of making that specific film. Foregrounding the creative impulse and artistic vision of the screenwriter and showing the complex cinematic realization by the producer and his team, such ‘Making ofs’ contribute to the viewers’ and thus also to the networks’ appreciation of their craft, increasing a series’ value. (cf. McCabe, Akass 2007: 174)

In modern mass culture, creating a sellable concept for a new TV show is by far the greatest challenge for a writer. According to Roberta Pearson, Director of the Institute of Film and Television Studies at the University of Nottingham and co-editor of *Cult Television* (2004),

The development of a new show normally takes a year, starting in June, when networks start accepting scripts for potential pilots. The networks greenlight the lucky ones in January, at which points the producers must quickly assemble cast and crew and wrap production of a pilot within two weeks. Over the next two months networks executives screen the pilots and make the final selections. After the schedulers have determined time-slots, the new shows are presented to advertisers in May. (McCabe, Akass 2007: 242)

Furthermore American episodic television, running 26 weeks of the year, is a form that devours ideas. With its pressurized production schedules, it requires cooperation and an experienced team of writers, who work on the scripts, have little time for false starts or revisions. But above all a series needs regular creative input, in order to reach the expected output of usually one episode a week. (cf. McCabe, Akass 2007: 176)

*Lost* is a particularly successful show, which typifies the post-network era. Owned and funded by Touchstone Television and produced by Bad Robot, the production company of J.J. Abrams, the series premiered in autumn 2004, sending ABC to the top of the U.S. network ratings chart, earning an Emmy and a Golden Globes for best drama series. (cf. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lost_(TV_series); June 3, 2010)

Industry insiders confirm that “Lost’s authenticity and legitimacy stemmed not from the struggling ABC network, but from its creators J.J. Abrams and Damon Lindelof”. The *Los Angeles Times* even claims that Abrams, having produced even the hit series *Alias* (ABC 2001-6), “is the hottest young producer
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION TO TELEVISION STUDIES

in television” (McCabe, Akass 2007: 242). Similarly the show’s fragmented and complex storytelling, its movie-like style and production values made it a hallmark of the quality TV era. (cf. McCabe, Akass 2007: 244f.)

Based on the initial idea to do Castaway as a series, Lost’s creators enhanced the story with surprising twists and reveals, multiple interwoven story lines, making even the process of storytelling a spectacle. Being aware, that in a 22-episodes per year television season, the show would at the earliest pay off after four to five years (88-110 episodes) and maybe run for ten or more years, they had to create a dense serial narrative concept which would capture the audience over hundreds of episodes until a final resolution, which would lie years in the future. (cf. McCabe, Akass 2007: 246)

Due to these temporary dimensions series are still prone to take on a life of their own, moving in unpredictable directions. Sometimes changing producers, or the sudden death of actors might trigger deviations in style or content, but also the fact that their episodes are penned by multiple writers and shot in a few days, which frequently requires improvisation or tradeoffs, might unexpectedly drive the narration into a dead end. So e.g. The producers of X-Files always claimed to know the way, but in the end completely bypassed the long expected resolution, and also many Lost viewers are doubting that there will be a logical explanation of the many ’supernatural’ things that happen in the series, even though Abrams and Lidelof claim to have a plan. (cf. McCabe, Akass 2007: 246f.)

The Writers Strike of America in 2007/8 was an expression of their growing self-confidence and anger about their underpaid work. When negotiations over a new basic contract and a Minimum Basic Agreement failed, the Writers Guilds of America East and West (labour unions representing film, television and radio writers) decided to march against a historical injustice, namely the continually diminishing monetary compensation writers got, compared to the steadily growing profits and market opportunities (DVDs, Internet, ...) of the large studios and networks. (cf. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2007-2008_Writers_Guild_of_America_strike; June 2, 2010)

The strike was directed against The Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers, a trade organization representing the interests of 397 American film and television producers. The most influential of these are ten corporations: CBS (headed by Les Moonves), MGM (headed by Harry E. Sloan), NBC Universal (headed by Jeffrey Zucker), The Weinstein Company (headed by Harvey Weinstein and Bob Weinstein), Lionsgate (headed by Jon Feltheimer), News Corp/Fox (headed by Peter Chernin), Paramount Pictures (headed by Brad Grey), Anchor Bay/Liberty Media/Starz (headed by Chris McGurk), Sony Pictures (headed by Michael Lynton), the Walt Disney Company (headed by Robert Iger), and Warner Bros. (headed by Barry Meyer). (cf. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2007-2008_Writers_Guild_of_America_strike; June 2, 2010)

After paralyzing the U.S. film industry for 100 days, the parties reached a tentative agreement. But according to a National Public Radio (NPR) report, filed on February 12, 2008, the strike cost the economy of Los Angeles an estimated $1.5 billion. A report from the UCLA Anderson School of Management put the loss at $380 million, while economist Jack Kyser put the loss at $2.1 billion. (cf. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2007-2008_Writers_Guild_of_America_strike; June 2, 2010)
1.9 Contemporary Themes and Issues

Genre mixing, multi-layered story lines, complex characters, and psychological depth, allow contemporary TV producers to explore a multitude of themes and issues. According to the expectations of their target audience they cover a very broad range or individualize their series by selecting e.g. political or gender specific topics or challenging them with alternative or innovative concepts like e.g. gay or lesbian relationships.

Even if the cable revolution results in a increasingly fragmented audience, and series are set in varying context, the plot usually centers on everyday concerns, human desires and human tragedy. The format lives on issues of love, compassion, deceit, hate, envy, money, sex, violence, murder, and loss, which are much easier to exploit if a story can be stretched over several episodes and therefore can be deepened.

Observing the current TV program it is obvious, that there is a very broad spectrum of series for all tastes, offering and sometimes mixing comedy and tragedy, also called 'dramedy'. Embedding their stories in different contexts and authentic settings, TV producers try to cover all areas of life and fantasy.

In order to give an overview of the various types of ‘quality’ productions, the following table provides several examples of well received Quality U.S. series, currently aired on German speaking channels like RTL2, SAT1, PRO7 and ORF. This list is by no means complete, considering the flood of new series and seasons each year, it is only a glimpse. Categorizing them according to their sub-genres and settings, I will briefly outline their overall themes and issues.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title of Series</th>
<th>Type of Series</th>
<th>Main Setting(s)</th>
<th>Main Themes and Issues</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emergency Room (ER)</td>
<td>Medical drama</td>
<td>hospital, Chicago</td>
<td>Daily hospital/private practice routine, relationships, affaires, friendships rivalries and hostilities among hospital staff, comical, emotional and spectacular medical cases and incidents with patients</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chicago Hope</td>
<td>Medical Drama</td>
<td>hospital, Chicago</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grey’s Anatomy</td>
<td>Medical Drama</td>
<td>hospital, Seattle</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private Practice</td>
<td>Medical Drama</td>
<td>private practice, L.A.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex and the City</td>
<td>Romantic Comedy-Drama</td>
<td>N.Y. Manhattan</td>
<td>Live and relationships of urban upper-middle class single women, independence, friendship, fashion, sex, witty dialogues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lipstick Jungle</td>
<td>Romantic, Comedy-Drama</td>
<td>N.Y. Manhattan</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desperate Housewives</td>
<td>Comedy-Drama Mystery</td>
<td>fictional U.S. suburb neighbourhood</td>
<td>Lives and relationships of middle class women (housewives) in their thirties, family, friendship, intrigues, affaires, public life vs. private life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nip/Tuck</td>
<td>Medical Drama, Black Comedy</td>
<td>private practice, Miami</td>
<td>Relationships, family, vanity, beauty cult and possibilities of modern cosmetic surgery, frequently taken ad absurdum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Show</td>
<td>Type</td>
<td>Setting</td>
<td>Summary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>Sitcom</td>
<td>Monica’s apartment, Central Perk Café, N.Y. C</td>
<td>Love and friendship between Ross and Rachel, and Monica, friendship, family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two and a Half Men</td>
<td>Sitcom</td>
<td>Uncle Charlie’s house at Malibu Beach</td>
<td>Charlie’s affairs and hedonism, Alan’s clumsiness and failures with women, and their influence on Alan’s son Jake, sex, education, family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scrubs</td>
<td>Comedy Drama</td>
<td>Sacred Heart Hospital L. A.</td>
<td>A group of medical school freshmen confronted with daily hospital routine, sarcastic staff members and other obstacles, experiences, private life and relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malcolm in the Middle</td>
<td>Comedy Drama</td>
<td>fictional U.S. suburb neighbourhood</td>
<td>Malcolm and his brothers’ daily struggle against their overbearing authoritarian mother and dysfunctional father, competition among brothers, genius vs. stupidity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gilmore Girls</td>
<td>Comedy Drama</td>
<td>fictional New England town ‘Stars Hollow’</td>
<td>Lorelai Gilmore’s maturing from a pregnant teen runaway, who drops out of school to a self-confident mother and manager of the Dragonfly Inn. Life and relationships in a provincial town full of eccentric people, witty and fast dialogues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ally McBeal</td>
<td>Legal Drama</td>
<td>law office, court 'Martini Bar’, Boston</td>
<td>Daily routine in the law office, relationships and hostilities between staff members, emotional and comical cases and odd trials in court</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boston Legal</td>
<td>Legal Drama, Black Comedy</td>
<td>law office, court, Boston</td>
<td>Daily routine in the law office relationships and hostilities between staff members, sexism, sex, politics.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law and Order</td>
<td>Legal, Police Procedural Drama</td>
<td>N.Y. Homicide Division and court</td>
<td>Realistic depiction of police investigations and criminal proceedings, social background of the cases.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TV Show</td>
<td>Type</td>
<td>Setting</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
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<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSI</td>
<td>Crime Drama, Police Procedural Drama</td>
<td>Crime Scene Unit Las Vegas, office, laboratory and crime scenes</td>
<td>From Crime Scene Investigation to police procedures of Gil Grissom and his team, solving cases with help of modern scientific methods and equipment, relationships and problems of team members, spectacular and often extremely violent cases staged with great detail.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cold Case</td>
<td>Crime Drama, Police Procedural Drama</td>
<td>Homicide Division, Philadelphia,</td>
<td>Police investigation of unsolved cases from the archive, use of contemporary scientific methods, frequent flashbacks help to reconcile the past with the present, emotional involvement of Detective Lilly Rush and her team.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monk</td>
<td>Crime Drama, Detective Comedy-Drama</td>
<td>Homicide Division, San Francisco</td>
<td>Police and private investigations by Adrian Monk, a former police detective, who suffers from several obsessive disorders and has an eye for detail.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Action Drama, Thriller</td>
<td>Fictional Counter Terrorist Unit based in L.A.</td>
<td>Prevention of and defence against terrorist attacks from the outside and inside of the U.S. Jack Bauer and his team are confronted with traitors and political intrigues, spies, biological, chemical and atomic weapons, which often requires them to disobey orders or the law.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lost</td>
<td>Science Fiction/Mystery/Adventure Drama</td>
<td>Mysterious tropical island somewhere in the South Pacific</td>
<td>The lives and struggles of plane-crash survivors stranded on a mysterious island, relationships and group dynamics, people’s past, strange supernatural occurrences, hostile natives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prison Break</td>
<td>Action Drama, Fugitive Drama, Thriller</td>
<td>Fox River State Penitentiary</td>
<td>After his brother Lincoln Burrows has been innocently sentenced to death, Michael Scofield gets himself in prison to help Lincoln escape. Life in prison, escape, conspiracy.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION TO TELEVISION STUDIES**
Dexter

Drama, Police Drama

Miami Metro Police Department

The story of a serial murder working as forensic blood-spatter analyst for the Miami Police Department. Trying to lead a normal life next to his nightly activities, Dexter marries and tries to be a good husband and father. Self-administered justice vs. the dysfunctional legal system and incompetent detectives.

True Blood

Vampire-Mystery Series

‘Bon Temps’, a fictional Louisiana smalltown

Humans and vampires peacefully co-exist until Sookie Stackhouse a telepathic waitress falls in love with a vampire, Bill Compton.

Table 1.3: Series currently aired on central European networks

1.10 Audience Studies and Guiding Principles of Contemporary Series Reception

A recent ORF market and media study examined the effects of TV series and the reception of their role models among Austrian viewers. Hedwig Zehetner and her team carried out an extensive content and audience analysis of common role models and the para-social relationships and interaction between the viewers and the main characters featured in the 42 series broadcasted weekly on ORF channels in 2004. (cf. Zehetner, 2008: 1)

Creating an instantly recognizable and familiar fictional world on screen, series tend to establish a much more intimate relationship with their audience, than other genres. Featuring diverse characters, sometimes stereotyped or at least archetypical, in common constellations, they explore the complex dynamics of their social interaction and problems, inviting to ‘join’ them regularly, as if taking part in their lives.

Exploring the effects of series characters as role models and examining the feelings, viewers develop towards them, the study has shown a broad variety of ‘relationships and attitudes’. These are ranging from different degrees of absolute or partial identification, which might be permanent or temporary, to simple admiration, compassion or contempt for the person, to laid-back observation out of a certain emotional distance. (cf. Zehetner 2008: 16ff.)

Furthermore the statistical results of the study indicate that there are two major types of TV series which appeal to two groups of viewers. While younger audiences and particularly men prefer series that offer action, tempo, tension, serious issues, cool and tough characters, older and especially female viewers ask for tranquility and a small manageable ideal world, everyday issues, soft versions of reality and idealized characters. (cf. Zehetner 2008: 17)

Thus Zehetner concludes that the first, predominantly male group demands programs with a high stimuli intensity, seeking a controlled destabilization, par-
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION TO TELEVISION STUDIES

participation from a safe distance. Contrary the second, predominantly female
group prefers series with a simple structure, with a stabilizing and calming ef-
fect, allowing the viewer to enjoy the program and relax in front of their TV.
(cf. Zehetner 2008: 17)

Considering series' effects on society ORF, audience research has proven that
series characters do rarely function directly as role models. Reflecting on modern
life, they rather spread or establish contemporary attitudes, values and trends
in a very subtle way. Indirectly chronicling societal change, series are usually
slightly behind reality; but Zehetner argues that especially U.S. series are ahead
of the times, pushing the boundaries (at least) in Europe. (cf. Zehetner 2008:
20)

Taking up young contemporary trends and exaggerating them, U.S. pro-
grammes are usually more progressive than European television, and consider-
ing the boom of Jimmy Chu and Manolo Planik shoes, after Carrie Bradshaw
(Sex and the City), a self-confessed fashion addict, wore them in the series, the
influence of American series on European culture should not be underestimated.
Featuring gay characters (Desperate Housewives, Six Feet Under), neurotic per-
sonalities (Monk), psychopaths (Dexter) and sexually “open” female shopaholics
(Sex and the City) in main roles, U.S. television is cutting edge. In addition,
contemporary European series productions, magazines and advertising take up
these trends or images, which doubles their effect.

Exploring role models in TV series, Zehetner was particularly interested,
how the change in gender role was reflected in series and perceived by viewers.
With the help of audience research, it was possible to show that viewers are well
aware of these developments. Arguing that in earlier times female characters
were usually objects of desire, spouses, mothers and housewives, playing only
supporting parts, viewers seemed to be aware of a massive revaluation of female
characters. (cf. Zehetner 2008: 21)

Many contemporary shows feature strong, independent and sexually active
women in leading parts. Presenting them as equal and sometimes even intel-
lectually or morally superior to men, these series portray self-confident female
detectives (The Closer, Cold Case), managers (Sex and the City), housewives
(Desperate Housewives) and single mothers (Hawthorne, Gilmore Girls), who
manage their lives brilliantly without the support of men.

Simultaneously also the image of men has changed and viewers noticed that
dominant male character types of the tough action hero like Superman, or Bat-
man and cool macho (Sonny Crockett in Miami Vice), are slowly replaced by
a more sensitive and emotional modern man (Friends, Grey’s Anatomy, Emer-
gency Room, Private Practice, Burn Notice), who has no problem with cooking
and household chores. Although there is still a dominant aesthetic code for
characters of both sexes, muscles are slowly becoming less important than in-
tellect, style and charisma (see Monk, Dr. House, Dexter, Ally McBeal). (cf.
Zehetner 2008: 23f; 25f.)

As psychological depth has become an important key word in contemporary
series business, producers are trying to create exceptional, unique and amiable
characters, which are easy to remember. In order to give them a certain au-
thenticity, it is highly important to keep the balance between their outstanding
talents and performance, and their human weaknesses. Portraying them with
little flaws or sometimes even serious mental disorders, modern show cast try
to offer a wide range of complex characters.
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Being ahead of his time, *Ally McBeal* producer David E. Kelley was one of the first to set up a cast of charismatic, but particularly odd and neurotic lawyers in Boston. Ally, the show’s heroine, is a naïve and insecure daydreamer, unable to enter into a new relationship, after her one and only love died. The plot revolves around her tragic-comic affairs and attempts to find Mr. Right.

Similarly Richard Fish and John Cage, the two senior partners of the law office are highly eccentric. While Richard is a shallow and narcissistic macho, always hungry for sex and money, and well known for his sexist remarks, John Cage represents the other end of the scale. He is small, insecure and lives in his own world. His Tourette syndrome, stutter and his other obsessive neurosis force him to do strange things, particularly when he is in court. Hearing Perry White songs in his head and whistling with his nose whenever he is nervous, John is an odd but kind person as well as an ingenious lawyer, and his character has been copied many times. (cf. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ally_McBeal; June 2, 2010)

Also *Boston Legal*, a younger law series, features Christian Clemenson, a middle-aged lawyer, who suffers from the Asperger-Syndrom, a form of Autism, which makes it difficult for him to connect with other people. In addition, he has developed several odd ticks like keeping his hands always on his thighs, and jumping for joy whenever he feels so. Awkward situations make him purr like a cat and occasionally he cries out “Bingo”!

*Monk* producer Andy Breckman, finally based a whole detective series on a detective, who has been suspended from office due to his mental disorders. Since he had a nervous breakdown after his wife was killed by a car bomb, Adrien Monk suffers from a range of phobias and multiple compulsive habits, which handicap him in his everyday life and social interaction. Cleaning everything pedantically, before he touches it, avoiding any bodily contact and counting lamp posts, he is still a brilliant private detective, but needs his nurse Sharona Fleming to pull him out of his isolated life. Currently the series holds the record for the most-watched drama episode in cable television history, with and estimated 9.4 million viewers in the U.S. (cf. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monk_(TV_series); June 2, 2010)

Also the ORF study has shown that viewers prefer such characters over Mr. or Mrs. Perfect. Still they are willing to accept a wider scope of male personalities (from macho to softy), while heroines are usually expected to reconcile ‘male’ qualities like assertiveness and self-confidence, with qualities frequently ascribed to women, such as social competence, compassion and attractiveness. (cf. Zehetner 2008: 23, 25)

Asking viewers about their motivation to watch series, Zehetner found that also their relief and escape-function plays an important role. (cf. Zehetner 2008: 16) Predominantly targeted at the working population, this format is broadcasted from the afternoon to midnight. So whenever people come home from work, they can lean back and relax in front of their TV-set. Drawing them into an exiting, alternative TV universe, series follow certain genre patterns and are thus much more predictable and ‘safer’ than reality.

Centering on charismatic characters and their lives, identification or emotional involvement in the stories told in series influence our feelings and state of mind, which Zehetner calls their mood-management function. (cf. Zehetner 2008: 16) Integrating characteristics of soap drama, modern series play heavily on a broad spectrum of emotions, making viewers feel with the characters.
Thus, in order to leave the audience with a certain satisfaction and optimism, episodes usually finish with a happy end, or at least one of the story lines takes a positive turn, while frequently a cliffhanger invites them to see what happens next time.

### 1.11 Social Realism and Surrealism

Comparing traditional series with 'quality' series, Glen Creeber argues that “television drama has seen a shift away from the depiction of external/political realities to a more self-reflexive, multidimensional and subjective form.” (Creeber 2004: 14) Mixing soap characteristics with serialized 'flexi-narratives', contemporary series tend to engage in a more subtle form of social and cultural criticism, exploring rather the political nature of the characters’ personal lives, which allows a more convincing depiction of everyday life and politics.

For example *Ally McBeal* producer David E. Kelley introduced a new form of mixing sequences, depicting the fictional outside world of characters, with scenes flashing upon their inner eye. This technique gives him a chance to show their inside reality, their secret wishes and unexpressed feelings, which would otherwise remain in the dark. Used to the series’ stylistic and narrative patterns, regular viewers are usually able to ascribe unrealistic and exaggerated events to the characters’ fantasy.

Particularly Ally’s wishful thinking or daydreams contribute to the extravagant, fanciful style of the law series, making up a considerable part of the plot, e.g. in scenes, when the head of a competing lawyer explodes in court, the big breasts of a female 'competitor’ burst like two balloons, her boss delivers a laudatory speech on her outstanding performance, or she passionately kisses a man she would never dare to kiss.

The realistic quality of the scenes frequently deludes the audience (particularly unregular viewers) to believe that, what they see is indeed happening in the fictional reality of the series. Usually, at the end of such scenes, a jingle (the sound we know from old fashioned record players, when the needle is scratching over the plate) indicates that the viewer, and sometimes even Ally herself, have been misled by her vivid imagination, emphasizing how easy it is to delude oneself or the audience.
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Playing around and sometimes subverting realist TV aesthetics, this new form of drama is often referred to as ‘social surrealism’. Juxtaposing and sometimes blending the rational and the irrational world, it implies and builds on the viewer’s subjective interpretation and is thus more flexible in reflecting the subtle nuances of postmodern society and its moral inconsistencies. (cf. Creeber 2004: 15)

1.12 Plot Structure and Character Constellation of Contemporary ’Quality’ Series

While traditional series were aimed at a broad audience, featuring comparatively simple, chronological and self-contained plot lines, modern quality shows have developed a new self-consciousness, challenging the viewers with a new complexity. Displaying a highly individualized style and usually targeted at a particular target audience, they are applying experimental techniques, featuring complex character constellations, combining multiple perspectives and plot strands, and fragmented, non-chronological narration. The reason for this can be found in everyday life.

Considering the household environment of television, it is difficult for TV producers to keep the viewers’ attention throughout a whole episode. In our busy and fast paced world, people tend to communicate and perform all kinds of tasks while watching TV. In addition commercial breaks and the multitude of channels tempt them to zap through the different programs and maybe stick with another one, - an act which television producers fear most.

Finally, as our society shows an ever growing hunger for information input and sensual stimuli, producers are under permanent pressure to keep up a certain tension and information density throughout each episode, which explains the growing narrative complexity in series. This way viewers, who watch a whole episode with attention, are rewarded with maximum information and maximum tension, reaching a higher level of knowledge about plot and characters, than those who let themselves be distracted by their surroundings or other channels.

Contemporary series are often so dense in information, that they require more than one viewing, in case somebody wants to understand all the hidden traits, meanings or gags (e.g. *Lost*). Considering the numerous times successful shows are usually broadcast (either on different or the same channels), before they are finally released in DVD collections, this strategy makes sense and has proved highly profitable to the TV industry.

Still, from a producer’s perspective, it is equally important to entertain those viewers who are less interested in details, watching the series sporadically and with less attention. Thus contemporary ‘quality’ TV features multiple story lines to maximize the pleasure of both groups, as an episode might offer the satisfaction of narrative closure by resolving one story line, and still sustain viewers’ interest by continuing others or introducing new ones.

Central to each series is its main plot, which develops over several seasons, revolving around its core issue, establishing the central characters, and gradually providing more background information about their lives. It is usually constructed in a way that even irregular viewers can still follow the story. In *Sex and the City* this would be the life of Carrie Bradshaw and three of her clos-
est friends, all single woman in their thirties and forties, living in Manhattan. (cf. Creeber 2004: 140f.)

Additionally each season offers one or several subplots, which might be finalized (resolved) within one, or run over several episodes. In the case of *Sex and the City*, each episode revolves around one of Carrie’s experiences with men and relationships, on which she reflects in her weekly column, “using it as a tool of self-discovery about her own life”, (Creeber 2004: 141). Finally producer Darren Starr enriched each episode plot with separate story lines, revealing also the complex and intimate lives of Carrie’s friends Samantha Jones, Charlotte York and Miranda Hobbes.

In order to increase tension and persuade the audience not to miss the next episode, most series make regular or occasional use of cliffhangers. In addition their episodes frequently start with a short trailer in which a narrator briefs the audience about what has happened so far. E.g. all *Sex and the City* and *Desperate Housewives* episodes are introduced and concluded by a narrator, who sums up and foreshadows what happens next.

As obvious in Figure 1.1 on page 36 and Figure 1.2 on page 39, the predominant strategy of increasing the number of subplots is to expand the group of main characters. Considering the average cast of modern ‘quality’ shows, it is easy to recognize, that the single hero of pre- ‘quality’ series (e.g. Michael Knight, Mac Gyver) is gradually replaced by a group of heroes, or at least the minor characters have been upgraded, while one of them still has the lead. To provide a continuous multi-layered narrative framework, blockbuster series like *Sex and the City*, *Desperate Housewives*, *Emergency Room*, *Grey’s Anatomy* and *Ally McBeal* feature large close-knit groups of varied personalities with often contrasting perspectives. (cf. Creeber 2004: 141)

A series’ composition of characters usually underlies three basic aims of
Ethnicity | Number of People
---|---
Total | 301,237,703
White alone | 223,965,009
Black or African alone | 37,131,771
American Indian and Alaska Native alone | 2,419,895
Asian alone | 13,164,169
Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander alone | 446,16
Other races alone | 17,538,990
Two or more races | 6,571,705


When American film industry finally started to acknowledge its multicultural background, the U.S.’ racial and religious pluralism gave it a further advantage on the international TV market. Not only the prominence of the English language, but also the universal character composition, involving different races, nationalities and cultures, familiarizes people all over the world with their programmes. E.g. U.S. medical series like *Scrubs*, *Grey’s Anatomy* feature African-Americans, Hispanics, Asian-Americans and other ethnicities in major and minor roles, trying to draw a realistic picture of U.S. hospital reality.

In addition they play heavily on different character types and stereotypes. Comparing for example the cast of series targeted at urban middle class women, it is easy to recognize that the casts of *Sex and the City*, *Desperate Housewives* and *Ally McBeal* are based on well established stereotypes:

- The ‘cool blonde sex addicts’ like Samantha Jones (*Sex and the City*), Edie Britt (*Desperate Housewives*), Nell Porter (*Ally McBeal*),
- the ‘cold hearted and manipulative men eaters’ like e.g. Gabrielle Solis (*Desperate Housewives*) and Ling Woo (*Ally McBeal*),
- the ‘conservative women and perfect housewives’ like Brie Van De Kamp (*Desperate Housewives*), and Charlotte York (*Sex and the City*),
- the ‘naïve, insecure and clumsy romantics’ like Ally McBeal (*Ally McBeal*), Susan Mayer (*Desperate Housewives*)
- the single or ‘do it yourself mothers’ like Lynette Scavo (*Desperate Housewives*) and Miranda Hobbes (*Sex and the City*) have almost become stock
Similarly the series feature male character types such as

- 'cool, rich and often unfaithful urban machos' like e.g. Mr. Big and Aleksander Petrovsky (Sex and the City),
- 'faithful and down to earth softies' like Aidan Shaw (Sex and the City) and Mike Delfino (Desperate Housewives),
- 'the gay, insecure and neurotic best friends', like John Cage (Ally McBeal), Anthony Marentino (Sex and the City).

But also the cast constellation plays an important role for the continuity of the plot lines. Once a story line is exhausted, screen writers have to decide, whether to stick with the established cast or to replace certain characters by new ones. In general producers try to keep well received characters as long as possible, because particularly regular viewers tend to identify with them and would be disappointed or even distracted, if their personal hero suddenly disappeared.

Thus one strategy of narrative economy is to keep and recombine already established characters with each other. Formerly employed by soap writers, this technique has also prevailed in series: E.g. in Desperate Housewives Idi and Brie enter into relationships with the ex-husbands of their best friends Gabrielle and Susan. But also in the success series Beverly Hills 90210 (1990 Fox), much of the series' plot was built on teenage relationships, thus the characters were frequently recombined in order to create new situations and problems, which the teenagers had to cope with.

The alternative to character recombination is the elimination of exhausted and introduction of new, interesting personalities, which usually brings fresh air to the plot. But it also goes with a certain risk to have a flop character, who is not well received by the audience. Still in the run of a series the cast usually changes and expands from season to season, including also secondary main characters, who appear only occasionally, but play a central role in these episodes.

Characters who are particularly well received by the audience might even take over the main part in the series, or get their own spin-off series, like e.g. Grey’s Anatomy star Kate Walsh (alias Dr. Addison Forbes Montgomery), who started out as a guest character playing Grey’s opponent, finally got the lead in Private Practice, another successful ABC production by Shonda Rhimes.

### 1.13 Examples

Without trying to categorize them, the following section will provide further examples of particularly successful ‘quality’ series. In order to show their highly individualized narrative and visual styles, I will take up specific features or peculiarities, and analyze them with respect to genre-specific features.

#### 1.13.1 Lost, a 'Puzzle’ Series

Mixing reality TV with science fiction and mystery elements, Lost creators Jeffrey Lieber, J. J. Abrams and Damon Lindelof introduced one of the most
innovative concepts at the time. Telling the story of a large group of plane crash survivors stranded on a mysterious island, the series features 20 regular speaking roles among 71 passengers, which represents one of the biggest casts in current U.S. primetime television. (cf. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lost_(TV_series); May 20, 2010)

Apart from the large cast, also the fact that Lost was filmed almost entirely on the island Oahu in Hawaii, increased costs of production beyond initial expectations. The series’ two-part pilot episode was the most expensive in the ABC network history, reportedly costing between US$10 and $14 million, compared to the average cost of an hour-long pilot in 2005 of $4 million. But together with fellow ABC series Desperate Housewives and Grey’s Anatomy, Lost became one of the biggest critical and commercial successes of the 2004 television season and for the network the investment paid back. (cf. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lost_(TV_series); May 20, 2010)

Considering the fact, that all three success series feature particularly large casts, Bryan Burk, executive producer of Lost argues that the writers (and thus the audience) benefit from more flexibility in story decisions, claiming that “You can have more interactions between characters and create more diverse characters, more back stories, more love triangles.” (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lost_(TV_series); May 20, 2010)

Interweaving the stories of about 20 main characters and narrating on several time levels, Lost shows a particularly fragmented narrative style, making heavy use of flashbacks and ‘flash-forwards’. The plot can be seen as a ‘puzzle’ and the multiple story lines, involving the survivors, a mysterious island and its hostile natives, as well as supernatural events, are parts of a whole which the viewer must try to piece together and understand.

Due to the complex plot, Bryan Burk’s team developed a very special episodic format. After a short recap of the events relevant to the following narrative, the show usually starts with a cold opening (or a teaser), which means jumping directly into the story before the title sequence and opening credits are shown. This way the viewer gets immediately involved into the plot, which is supposed to keep him/her from zapping and establish tension right from the beginning. Usually after an initial event, in a dramatic moment the screen cuts to black and the title graphic Lost, slightly out of focus, glides to the center and a loud ‘knock’, the series’ jingle, resounds. (cf. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lost_(TV_series); May 20, 2010)
Then the opening credits appear, but to avoid any interruption, they are blend over the subsequent scenes. Apart from the continuous story arc, each episode features flashbacks or ‘flash-forwards’ on one character, providing background information on him or her, but also throwing up questions about that person. The extremely complex and open plot, which takes surprising turns in each episode, makes it impossible for the viewer to understand the mystery of the island. But, instead of frustrating the viewers, Burk and his team manage to turn their confusion into curiosity.

Trying to make sure that they won’t miss the next episode, Lost usually ends quite abruptly with a cliffhanger or suspenseful twist, followed by a smash cut to black, the title graphics and the jingle. Those few episodes, which finish with the resolution of a story line, feature a reflective closing scene and a subsequent fade to black. (cf. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lost_(TV_series); May 20, 2010)

1.13.2 24’s Real Time Concept

Taking up an actual issue which dominates U.S. press and foreign policy, Joel Sunrow and Robert Cochran are not the only TV producers to ‘jump on the bandwagon’, setting their series in the present U.S. and drawing on the ‘myth’ of a permanent terrorist threat, which is kept secret by the CIA. But although it is only another series trying to exploit the public resentment and fears in times of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, the show should be discussed in terms of its visual and narrative real time concept.

24 (Twenty Four, 2001-2010) is a Fox Network action series, dealing with fictional terrorist attacks from inside the U.S. which are usually averted at the very last moment. Searching for a narrative approach which supported the fact that the CTU (Counterter Terrorism Unit) is operating under extreme time pressure, Surnow and Cochran had the idea to produce the thriller series in a
time format, mimicking real time. Thus one season of the show is made up of 24 episodes a 60 minutes, narrating all in all 24 hours out of the fictitious life of Jack Bauer (Kiefer Sutherland), a proficient Counter Terrorist agent, racing against the clock as he tries to prevent multiple terrorist plots, and uncovers political conspiracies. (cf. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/24_(TV_series); May 29, 2010](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/24_(TV_series); May 29, 2010)

Stressing the simultaneous action, each *24* season offers several fast paced and interwoven story lines, which revolve around investigations, tracking suspects, as well as the characters' private lives and interpersonal drama in the office. The show’s real time nature is highlighted by a ticking digital clock usually appearing before and after commercial breaks, which shows that Jack Bauer’s time continues to pass even during the breaks. As *24* has been produced for commercial networks, the actual length of one episode without commercials is 44 minutes. (cf. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/24_(TV_series); May 29, 2010](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/24_(TV_series); May 29, 2010)

The action switches between several locations and parallel adventures of different characters involved in the overall plot, thus there are long sections of unseen narrative concerning each of them. Still, to stress their simultaneous action, the series uses the split-screen, dividing the screen into two to four sections encircling the running clock in the centre, providing four snap-shots of what is happening to the different characters in different settings at a certain point of time. (cf. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/24_(TV_series); May 29, 2010](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/24_(TV_series); May 29, 2010)

One recurring theme of *24* is the inner struggle of characters confronted with ethical dilemmas, e.g. to let one tragic event happen in order to avoid another one, or to trade or sacrifice the lives of informants and agents for the sake of a greater good. Frequently the CTU members have to make fateful decisions in extreme situations and sometimes, in order to avoid further deaths or trails going cold, rules ‘must’ be broken and orders disobeyed. For example Jack Bauer and his Unit frequently employ torture or threats of torture in interrogation sessions, using fictional pain inducing drugs in order to get information from
culprits, a practice which has earned the show heavy criticism from human rights organizations. (cf. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/24_(TV_series); May 29, 2010)

1.13.3 *Dexter*, an Amiable Psycho Killer or a Subtle Discussion of Self-administered Justice

While former TV series like e.g. *Night Rider* used to paint the world in black and white, in terms of characters as well as in terms of their actions, but as read above, modern series are frequently set in the grey zone. Even though they still play on binary oppositions like head vs. heart, experienced vs. naïve, normal vs. abnormal, their tendency to overdraw characters’ virtues and vices gets slowly replaced by a more subtle approach.

Compared to the 90s, contemporary television leaves more room for moral judgement of the viewer, even though his or her reaction is of course anticipated and influenced by the way the story is presented. *Dexter* is a particularly provocative U.S. criminal series, that was originally produced for a pay-TV target audience, and after reaching record-breaking 2.6 million viewers on Showtime channel and winning several Emmys and Golden Globe Awards, it is currently aired on numerous networks world wide. (cf. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dexter_(TV_series); May 30, 2010)

Telling the enigmatic story of Dexter Morgan (Michael C. Hall), the series features a ‘sympathetic’ murderer in its main part. Dexter is a forensic blood spatter analyst working for the Miami Metro Police, leading a secret life as serial killer at night. After his mother was literally ‘butchered’ in front of his eyes, he was adopted by the police man Harry Morgan. When he gets older his childhood trauma catches up and the boy starts to isolate himself, killing animals in the neighborhood to satisfy his unstoppable urge to murder. (cf. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dexter_(TV_series); May 30, 2010)

Flashbacks throughout the series show, how Harry (who has died years before) realized that his beloved step son slowly turned into a killer, and how he tried to channel the boy’s violence towards those who ‘deserve’ it, namely other assassins, who can’t be caught by the police and would go on killing, if they weren’t stopped. Putting up a code of rules for Dexter, Harry trained him to prepare and cover his crimes cleverly, teaching him how to fake emotions and feelings in order to keep up his appearance. (cf. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dexter_(TV_series); May 30, 2010)

Dexter’s obsession with blood makes him a perfect blood spatter analyst and his profession allows him to find continuously new murderers to murder. Following his interior monologues, it is obvious for the audience, that he is a sociopath, but he is trying to make the best of his inner forces, using his spell to ‘free’ society of people like himself. The man’s genius and his absolutely rational decisions in combination with his charm slowly lure the viewers on his side, while his police colleagues are groping in the dark.

The series features a lot of black humor and violent scenes of ritualized killings, which still raise feelings of poetic justice. But, despite his principled approach, Dexter is a killer who plans and commits bloody murders. Throwing up questions of guilt, insanity, death sentence and self-administered justice, *Dexter* remains in the grey zone and the audience is frequently doubting whether it is on the right side or not.
Figure 1.5: Official DVD cover image of Dexter

Chapter 2

Special Case Analysis: Columbo vs. CSI

After showing, how series are designed to satisfy growing audience expectations, and to what extent codes and conventions of series production and reception have changed in general, the second part of this thesis will focus on developments in the detective fiction genre.

Trying to illustrate, to what extend the televisual, narrative and ideological qualities of crime series have changed, I will examine the CBS franchise blockbuster *CSI Las Vegas* (2000-) and compare it to *Columbo* (NBC 1968-2003), a 'cult' detective series which was popular in the 1970s and 80s. Both examples were chosen due to their representativeness of crime fiction in their times, as well as their success and long-term influence on the genre.

As a holistic approach to these shows would go beyond the scope of this thesis, I will loosely follow John Fiske’s classic examination of film (cf. Creeber 2006: 38f.), putting special focus on formalist and technical criteria like mise-en-scène, lighting and colour, camera work, editing, sound, music, episode structure and story arcs.

Formalism, as the major film theory today, aims to analyze the production, distribution and reception of TV (genres), and at its most general considers the synthesis (or the lack of synthesis) of the multiple elements as well as their common and individual emotional or intellectual effects. (cf. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Formalism_%28film%29; Dezember 2, 2010)

Pointing out the similarities and differences between the two shows, I will also draw parallels to Hitchcock thrillers, illustrating how the depiction of violence has changed throughout the years. Likewise I will consider issues of information density, voyeurism, stimuli intensity and stress level, showing how *CSI* as a modern crime series imitates and responds to our contemporary society.

2.1 COLUMBO

With short stories like *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* and *The Purloined Letter*, Edgar Allen Poe invented detective fiction during the late 1840s, creating the concept of the 'deductive, analytic mind'. His famous Parisian amateur detective C. Auguste Dupin, paved the way for characters like Sherlock Holmes
(Sir Arthur Conan Doyle) in the late 18th century, Hercule Poirot and Miss Jane Marple in the 1920s (Agatha Christie), Philip Marlowe in the 1930s (Raymond Chandler), and Columbo in the 1970s (William Link and Richard Levinson, NBC), who solved criminal cases by identifying with the culprit and considering facts as well as rational and irrational aspects of the human mind.

Their investigative schemes and practices usually mirrored the state of technology of their times. So Poirot, Marple and Marlow still depended on very concrete evidence (like e.g. a lost button, or footprints), clever interrogation of suspects and witnesses, psychological tricks and plots, exact time schemes, alibis and motives to find and convict the murderer.

Compared to those times, Lieutenant Columbo of the Los Angeles Police Department (played by Peter Falk) already has the advantage of some more progressive scientific methods. E.g. analysis of finger prints, footwear or tire tracks, comparison of human hair and ballistic firearms tests, as well as a better medical examination of the victim deliver more detailed information about time, place and cause of death.

Still, throughout the series many of his opponents are clever enough to cover such obvious traces and so he solves most of his cases with psychological ‘warfare’ based on his intrusive presence, as well as his disarming outfit and unnerving questions. Appearing like an absent-minded police detective, he is frequently underestimated by his opponents, whom he slowly drive to despair and reveal themselves.

Interpreting their reactions to his subtly allusive hypothesis, he occasionally even manages to trick them into joining his investigative activities. While playing cat and mouse with the murderers, his attention to detail helps him to gather the necessary proof.

The series became famous for introducing the concept of the ‘inverted detective story’ to detective films. Presenting the crime and the murderer usually at the beginning of each episode, the viewer is provided with important information, of which Columbo is totally unaware.

In general the genre lives on the mystery based on the unknown identity of the murderer, which is not revealed until the end of each episode, and the detective (as well as the audience) puts main focus on finding out who did it, why and how the murder was committed. But, watching Columbo, these questions are answered right away and the viewer spends most of the time wondering what clues will lead the genius detective to discover and understand the nature of the crime, and how he will manipulate the culprit to confess or unwittingly reveal his guilt.

In general, Columbo episodes start with a long introduction, showing the relationship between the killer and his victim, and revealing the motives of the murder. Next follows a rather ‘nonviolent’ and indirect depiction of the murder, avoiding bloody scenes, or defusing them with the help of clever camera and editing techniques (see 2.2.4.7. Violence and Voyeurism: A Comparison of Murder Scenes).

Putting main focus on how the murderer prepares and carries out his plan and how he tries to cover his traces, the series is driven by the characters and Columbo’s gathering of subtly damning proof. Most attention is dedicated to staging how the killers go through several emotional states, from arrogance, faked cooperativeness or carelessness due to Columbo’s chaotic appearance, to irritation, hostility, and finally panic, when they realize the detective’s genius.
Still, after being exposed as murderer, the antagonists usually confess and do not resist police authority.

Also Columbo never exercises physical force and rarely carries a weapon, confessing that he is a horrible shot and hates guns. He usually excuses himself for disturbing the suspect with his investigations and rarely displays anger to his opponent, only uncooperative witnesses or incompetent police officers annoy him. In several episodes he states that, over the years, he has grown to respect the suspect and he sometimes even befriends or feels compassion for them, although this frequently turns out to be part of his investigation tactics.

With his over-polite manners and his seemingly unprofessional, chaotic approach to the case, he lulls the murderer into a false sense of security. Pretending to admire the person for some reason and conducting seemingly harmless interviews, which he interrupts by 'Columbo-isms' such as ‘fumbling through his pockets for a piece of evidence, asking to borrow a pencil, or becoming distracted by something irrelevant at a dramatic point in a conversation ... are part of his unique investigative style. These little distractions help him to confuse the suspect and keep him off balance, tempting him or her to impatient and improvident reactions. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Columbo_(TV_series); June 28, 2010)

Usually Columbo ends such interviews by concluding politely according to what his opponent wants to hear, exiting the scene only to return and ask "Just one more thing". With this unexpected question, he catches the person off guard, hinting at inconsistencies concerning his or her statements and the facts. This forces the suspects to make up improvisational explanations, which
entangle them in further contradictions. But instead of uncovering them, he frequently pretends to discard all his doubts and hypothesis, leaving them with a bitter taste in their mouth and waiting for them to make further mistakes.

So behind his random interviews and observations the Columbo has a plan, but he does not allow the murderer to look into his cards until he gets the final clue. Thus he rarely accuses somebody directly, he rather prefers making very indirect allusions and applies psychological tricks. E.g. he frequently pretends to investigate against another person, asking the suspect to help him find the murderer. Fooling his opponents with his seemingly trustful and naive demeanor, he displays his genius only after the game is over. Piecing together apparently unimportant facts and unrelated incidents, he uncovers their supposedly perfect murders.

Columbo’s odd demeanor as well as his appearance undermine the concept of police authority, making him a perfect ‘genius’-anti-hero. His cross eyes, his old fashioned haircut, grubby trenchcoat, rumpled suit and his run-down car (a dirty 1959 Peugeot 403 convertible), which he seems to prefer to an official LAPD car, have become a kind of trademark. He is also known for constantly smoking cigars, which frequently irritates his opponents.

Throughout the 69 episodes executive producer Philip Saltzmann worked with a number of different authors and directors. The premiere of the first season, ‘Murder by the Book’ was written by Steven Bochco and directed by Steven Spielberg. Jonathan Demme directed the episode ‘Murder Under Glass’ (7th season) and Ben Gazzara directed ‘A Friend in Deed’. Also Peter Falk himself directed the last episode of the first season, ‘Blueprint For Murder’, just as fellow actor Nicholas Colasanto directed several episodes, including ‘Swan Song’ with Johnny Cash, and ‘Étude in Black’. (cf. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Columbo_(TV_series); July 4, 2010)

But Columbo was also known for featuring high-profile guest stars in the role of the murderer, the victim, as witness or as police colleague. E.g. George Hamilton, William Shatner, Jonny Cash, Faye Dunaway, George Hamilton, Leslie Nielsen, Martin Sheen, Kim Cattrall, Jamie Lee Curtis, Michael J. Fox and Oskar Werner appeared in roles of varying sizes, sometimes early in their careers. (cf. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Columbo_(TV_series); July 4, 2010)

Although the audience learns a lot about the murderer and his environment, Columbo himself remains a sort of mystery. His first name is never mentioned and nobody really knows how, and where he lives. He talks at length about his wife, her sisters and the rest of his family, but they never appear in the series. So the viewer never really knows, if Columbo only invents the stories about them in order to build up a personal relationship with the person he interviews. But in several incidents he talks with his wife on the telephone, and some other characters even claim to have met her.

In the episode ‘Rest in Peace, Mrs. Columbo’, she herself becomes the target of a killer (Helen Shaver). During the investigation Columbo states that his wife loves Chopin, and describes her as being busy with church, volunteering at the hospital, watching her sister’s children, and walking the dog five times a day. This episode teases the audience as to whether or not Mrs. Columbo has actually been murdered, and by featuring prominently displayed photographs of Mrs. Columbo, apparently finally disclosing her appearance to viewers. (cf. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Columbo_(TV_series); July 4, 2010) But at the end, the photos turn out not to show Columbo’s wife, even if her existence is
finally proved with this episode.

The series is set in L.A. and Columbo frequently deals with cases involving successful, rich and thus influential people who work for huge companies and live in beautiful houses and flats, where most of the action takes place. As Columbo prefers to do 'fieldwork', the show rarely features scenes set at the police department or the crime laboratory. Repeatedly disturbing the suspects at their workplace or intruding into their private sphere at home, Columbo interviews them in their own 'territory', where they feel safe and talk more freely. Frequently, these places are (or turn out to be) also the site of crime, which allows the series to unify the two major settings.

According to Nielsen ratings, *Columbo* was an immediate hit and Peter Falk won an Emmy Award for his role, becoming an icon of American detective fiction. The series was aired regularly from 1971 to 1978 on NBC's Sunday presentation of the 'Mystery Movie'. After ten successful seasons and several extra episodes, the series was finally cancelled in 2003 due to Peter Falk's Alzheimer. All *Columbo* episodes are movie-length (between 75 and 100 minutes) and can be broadcast in any order. (cf. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Columbo_ (TV_series); July 4, 2010)

### 2.2 CSI

*CSI Las Vegas* (Crime Scene Investigation), created by Anthony E. Zuiker and produced by Jerry Bruckheimer for CBS, is a contemporary example of American detective fiction, which premiered in 2000 on CBS. The series follows a team of forensic scientists working for the CSI division of the Las Vegas Police Department, who investigate and solve criminal cases with the help of modern science and high-tech equipment. Zuiker decided to set the show in Las Vegas because, as also mentioned in the pilot, the city's crime lab is one of the most active in the U.S.

The show has its roots in documentary crime series like *Autopsie* (RTL) or *The New Detectives: Case Studies in Forensic Science*, which deal with true crimes (mostly murders) and describe how they have been solved by the police. Providing background information and live interviews of the investigating police detectives and criminalists, episodes deal with two to three cases which have been solved.

Apart from original film and photo material showing the accused during the trial, the series tend to re-enact the murders and moments of important findings, putting special focus on the explanation of forensic details. Narrating several cases at once, the series tend to switch from one case to the other and back. Frequently aired on Discovery Channel, TLC and Investigation Discovery network, the series inspired Zuiker to produce a fictionalized version of them.

After spending time with real-life investigators, he wrote a spec script and asked Jerry Bruckheimer, who arranged several meetings with ABC, NBC and FOX executives, but they rejected the show. Finally CBS agreed to do a pilot with actor William Peterson, which was so well received, that the head of drama decided to include the show in the schedule for the upcoming season. (cf. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/CSI:_Crime_Scene_Investigation; July 11, 2010)

Being aired on Friday nights after *The Fugitive*, which was expected to be-
come an immediate success, CBS hoped that CSI would benefit from this prestigious program slot. But the series’ resonance exceeded all expectations and at the end of the season CSI Las Vegas outdid The Fugitive in viewing numbers and popularity, and two years later it became the most watched show on U.S. television. (cf. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/CSI:_Crime_Scene_Investigation; July 11, 2010)

Ten seasons of 23 to 25 episodes have been aired so far and the concept paid off, making CBS the most watched network on U.S. television from 2002 to 2007. According to an Advertising Age survey of media buying firms, this success allowed CBS to charge an average 262.600$ for a 30 seconds commercial. The following Table 2.1 on page 49 shows the viewing figures of CSI between 2000 and 2010 in the U.S. In May 2005, the fifth season’s finale attracted an audience of more than 35 million viewers, which is twice that of the nearest competition. (cf. http://www.csifiles.com/news/210505_03.shtml; July 11, 2010)

2.2.1 Franchise Spin-Offs and Crossovers

Considering the success of the first two seasons, CBS decided to produce spin-offs of the show, just as NBC had done with their hit series Law&Order. In the 1990s NBC had launched a new police procedural show named Law&Order, which was an immediate rating smash. Based on the idea to multiply profits by cloning well received shows, they did several spin-off series, which were equally created by Dick Wolf. The franchise project ended with its 20th season in May 2010, and gave a good return. (cf. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Law_%26_Order_(franchise); July 11, 2010)

Although the series were all unified by the same setting, similar style and filmic realization, the programmes dealt with varying aspects of the criminal justice system and together, the original series, its various spin-offs, the TV film, and crossover episodes with other shows constitute over 900 hours of crime fiction. Shared people and resources in a common setting are the connecting links between the shows. Several supporting characters like district attorneys, police officers, psychologists and medical personnel are shared among the dif-

<table>
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<th>Season</th>
<th>Episodes</th>
<th>Timeslot (EST)</th>
<th>Original Airing</th>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Viewers (in millions)</th>
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Table 2.1: Seasonal rankings of CSI Las Vegas (based on average total viewers per episode.) (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/CSI:_Crime_Scene_Investigation; June 29, 2010)
CHAPTER 2. SPECIAL CASE ANALYSIS: COLUMBO VS. CSI

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Figure 2.2: Official DVD cover images of CSI Las Vegas and its spin off series

different spin offs, and crossovers of main characters as well as shared storylines between two of the shows are quite common. Occasionally also major characters have switched from one series to another. (cf. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Law_%26_Order; July 11, 2010)

Adopting this strategy, also CBS network quickly capitalized on CSI Las Vegas (2000-present), launching two spin-offs: CSI: Miami (2002-present) and CSI: NY (2004-present), which were equally created by Anthony E. Zuiker, Carol Mendelson and Ann Donahue. Produced by Jerry Bruckheimer and his team, the three series differ only in setting and cast, while episode structure, theme and particularly the graphic and elaborate visual style are the same. Although there are some crossover episodes between CSI Las Vegas and its spin-offs, they rather present exceptions.

Ever since it flew to the top of Nielsen Ratings, reaching an audience of 2 billion people in over 200 countries, the series’ concept was copied many times, triggering a massive boom of police procedural drama, which has also been called the “CSI Effect”. Cold Case (CBS 2003-2010), Without A Trace (CBS 2007-present), Crossing Jordan (NBC 2001-2007), Waking the Dead (BBC 2000-present), Silent Witness (BBC 1996-present), and Bones (FOX 2005-present) are only a few examples of contemporary series, which show a similar production style, featuring a team of CSI specialists who solve cases with the help of modern science. But also crime shows focusing on forensic profiling like e.g. Criminal Minds (CBS 2005-present) and Lie To Me (Fox 2009-present) have spread immensely. The flood of crime fiction contributed to the emergence of new channels like RTL-Crime, which feature exclusively crime and detective series all day long.

Also TV ads and by-products such as ‘Making-of’ documentaries, film trailers, official websites, online discussion forums, DVD collections, soundtracks, videogames, novels and posters are a lucrative business, making sure that the series is present in all media. Contributing to the fast growing CSI fandom, this multi-channel marketing has also established the main characters as idols and resulted in a considerable boom and rise in social prestige of all professions related to forensics.

2.2.2 Cast, Guest Stars and Guest Directors

Among the huge cast of CSI Las Vegas, the series features an ensemble of 5 to 8 lead characters, from Shift Supervisor Dr. Gil Grissom (later replaced by
Dr. Ray Langston, to his Assistant Catherine Willows, Nick Stokes, Warrick Brown and Sarah Sidle (crime scene investigators), Capt. James Brass (police detective), Greg Sanders (trace technician) and Dr. Albert Robins (medical examiner). Though the members of the department show a strong sense of community and frequently support one another, they primarily operate in paired buddy teams.

Considering the shows cast CBS basically follows the traditional model, relying on a fruitful interplay between the success of the series and the fame of its actors. Trying to attach a certain prestige or image to a new series, production companies tend to cast one or two star actors for prominent roles. Of course this increases production costs considerably, but it usually helps to establish the show and the rest of the cast, which are frequently newcomers.

Also in the CSI franchise, the majority of actors were newcomers, only the faces of the heads of the departments were already known from major movies. While William Petersen stars in CSI Las Vegas as Dr. Gil Grissom, head of the Las Vegas crime lab, Gary Sinise plays Dr. Mac Taylor, his equivalent in the CSI New York spin-off and David Caruso got the lead as Lt. Horatio Caine, chief supervisor in CSI Miami. David Caruso had already won a Golden Globe for his role as Det. John Kelley in NYPD Blue, and also Gary Sinise had been awarded an Academy Award for his performance as Lt. Dan Taylor in Forrest Gump (Robert Zemeckis 1995) and a Golden Globe for his role in the TV movie Truman (HBO 1995). William Petersen’s face was known from several successful TV films such as Young Guns II (1990) or Deadly Currents (1993).

Playing shoulder to shoulder with star actors, also the rest of the main cast profited from their engagement. So e.g. Marge Helgenberger who stars as medical investigator and single mother Catherine Willows (CSI Las Vegas), and Emily Procter, who plays Dt. Calleigh Duquesne, ballistics expert in CSI Miami, have become famous and well paid series actors. Similarly John Eads (as Nick Stokes), Jorja Fox (Sarah Sidle), Gary Dourdan (as Warrick Brown), as well as Adam Rodriguez (as Dt. Eric Delko) took advantage of the series’ popularity, signing lucrative advertising contracts, appearing on the photo-covers of life-style magazines and in several live shows on TV. (cf. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/CSI:_Crime_Scene_Investigation; July 11, 2010)

Like Columbo, also CSI frequently features guest directors, e.g. ‘Grave Danger’ I and II, the two-part final of season 5, was directed by Quentin Tarantino. But also famous actors like Tony Curtis, Frank Gorshin, Faye Dunway, John Mayer, Taylor Swift, Sean Young and Candra West appeared as guest stars in major and minor roles. Laurence Fishburne appears twice as a guest star in the 9th season, before he finally takes over the lead in the 10th season, succeeding Gil Grissom as head of the department. (cf. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/CSI:_Crime_Scene_Investigation; July 11, 2010)

2.2.3 Detective Fiction and Genre Development

Film producer Tony Garnett (Beautiful Thing 1996) wrote, “Throughout history, people like us had to use existing structures and make them work for us as best as we can. If forced to work in a particular genre, we must try to subvert it, or put new wine in old bottles, or find other ways of creating ‘Trojan Horse
Drama’.” (cited by Cooke, 2003: 162) While in earlier times genres changed so slowly that they were considered to be fixed, nowadays no one would argue that film categories are rigid. On the contrary, generic hybridization and the creation of subgenres contributed to a general awareness, that just as our society changes, also TV genres are flexible and have to evolve in order to keep up with modern society.

Still, genre theorists agree that audiences organize and understand TV programmes on the basis of generic classifications, which raise certain expectations in viewers, that have to be fulfilled. Watching a film on TV we are usually informed in advance of what type it is. TV advertising, trailers and making ofs, but also the film title, theme, and a particular director or actor hint at a certain genre and help us to anticipate whether the film will meet our taste or not. (cf. Creeber 2004: 78)

Nowadays critics frequently treat genre-based programmes with suspicion, disapproving of their formulaic and manufactured text and thus considering them less innovative and challenging than others. (cf. Feuer 1992: 145) This is of course a reaction to mass production in the 1980s and 90s, when film industry, due to economic reasons, stuck to the already established, earning television a bad reputation as artistic medium. (cf. Creeber 2004: 78f.)

Although hybridisation has changed the genre landscape, even today programme directors prefer ‘commercial’ and genre specific formats to ‘avant-garde’ productions, and especially in the case of detective or police drama this has proved to be the right decision. Viewers of this type of programme show very fixed viewing habits and have particular expectations, which have to be satisfied. As Nicholas Abercrombie, professor of sociology at the department of Arts and Social Sciences, Lancaster University explains “Part of the pleasure is knowing, what the genre rules are, knowing that the programme has to solve problems in the genre framework and wondering how it is going to do so.” (1996: 43)

In a traditional detective film, the audience expects an ‘enigma’ (or teaser) at the beginning. Usually this is a serious crime, most likely a murder, which is enacted or revealed. Next follows the investigation part, in which a detective or a private person searches for clues that will lead to the murderer. This person comes across several witnesses, suspects and one or two ‘red herrings’, which means that he or she is set on a wrong track for a while. ‘Red herrings’ are a frequent method to increase suspense and form the story arc. Finally, realizing that he or she was misled by a person or his own conclusions, the ‘detective’ returns to the right path and finds the missing link. Reconstructing the crime, he eventually reveals the culprit, who’s capture and arrest represents the final resolution and satisfaction. (cf. Creeber 2004: 79)

Literary critic Jonathan Culler claims that the success of a detective film depends on its resolution, which has to stay within the bounds of logic and rationality, and should display a certain cleverness or genius of both, the detective and the criminal. Thus he writes that detective films are a “particularly good example of the force of genre conventions: the assumption, that characters are psychologically intelligible, that the crime has a solution, which will eventually be revealed, that the relevant evidence will be given and that the solution will be of some complexity, are all essential to the enjoyment of such texts.” (Culler 1975: 148)

But it is also a privilege of such generic programmes, to surprise and entertain by breaking the rules and contesting the viewers’ expectations. In case all
detective stories would follow the same formula, the genre would soon disappear. So some subtle variation is indeed desirable and necessary, but trying not to interfere with the narrative dynamics of the genre, it is very difficult to keep the balance between fulfilling and undermining viewer expectations. (cf. Creeber 2004: 80)

Following the golden rule to change only one of the ingredients of a well established formula, most crime writers decided to play on the safe side, e.g. by featuring a detective in a wheelchair (Ironside, NBC 1967-75), or replacing male detectives by females (Cagney and Lacey, CBS 1981-88) and depicting what hardship female officers had to face in a male dominated world. (cf. Creeber 2004: 80) Considering genre variation in the 1970s, Columbo, with its initial crime resolution (inverted detective story), its chaotic police detective and consequent abstinence from violent action scenes was a real dare, but it paid off, as the series simply tapped the pulse of the age.

Responding to cultural change the genre has to develop in order to keep pace with public opinion. E.g. while in the 1960s people were still willing to accept the cliché of the heroic and kind police officer, in the 1970s and 80s, series like The Sweeney (ITV 1975-82) or Hill Street Blues (NBC 1981-87) depicted the police as ambiguous and sometimes untrustworthy or even corrupt. As Leo Braudy, professor of English literature at the University of Southern California, put it “Genre films essentially ask the audience, ‘Do you still want to believe this?’ Popularity is the audience answering ‘Yes’. Change occurs when the audience says, ‘That’s too infantile a form of what we believe. Show us something more complicated’.” (cited by Creeber 2004: 80).

2.2.3.1 Science takes the lead: A New Concept for Crime Series

While in traditional detective series usually one or two police detectives (Columbo, Miami Vice), private eyes (Shaft, Hart to Hart), or ‘semi professionals’ (Jessica Fletcher, Miss Marple) investigated criminal cases, the CSI franchise took up the trend towards large main casts, which perfectly matched the concept of scientific teamwork, they wanted to show. Thus all three CSI shows feature a group of four to seven forensic specialists among the main characters, which, although split up in smaller investigative units, work cooperatively on their cases. Each of them is specialized on a certain field of forensics and instead of one single person, science and the collective whole of their special skills solves the cases.

This kind of teamwork of course requires organization and coordination, which legitimates a main character among the group, namely the chief supervisor, who decides about who is going to work with whom on which case and which steps are necessary to be taken. In CSI Las Vegas Dr. Gil Grissom (William Petersen) is in charge of the crime lab. Although the criminals are experienced and act with a certain autonomy, he is the central character, a strange mixture of father figure and drill sergeant, who keeps them together and guards their morals and work ethics. Protecting the team against influences from the outside as well as political or police-intern pressure, he stands for the enlightenment, objectivity and incorruptness of science.

While Columbo and his predecessors used to focus rather on psychology and the abysmal human mind, catching the murder with clever interviewing methods and elaborate plots, the CSI specialists rely on modern forensics, solving their
cases with the help of DNA technology, gunshot residue, fingerprint and blood spatter analysis etc. A huge part of each episode takes place in the laboratory, or directly at the crime scenes in Las Vegas, staging how meticulously the scientists carry out autopsies and analysis of pieces of evidence, searching for hints or traces, that could lead to the murderer.

Making crime drama out of scientific processes, these forensic activities clearly form the basis of the series’ plot. Elisabeth Devine, former criminalist and executive story editor on *CSI* stated that “a criminalist is a scientist who uses scientific training in the different disciplines of science to analyze evidence and prepare for court.” (Goode 2007: 124) Although they indirectly support police detectives, they are usually not involved in the investigations or carry out police interviews, thus in the first episode Grissom makes a clear distinction between criminalists and detectives, saying: “I don’t chase criminals. ... I just evaluate evidence. ....We’re no detectives, we are crime scene analysts, we are trained not to rely on verbal accounts and rely instead on the scene set before us.” (Goode in McCabe, Akass 2007: 124)

This rational and separate position of the criminalists is counterbalanced with their almost 'freakish' enthusiasm for modern forensics, their professional and social interaction as well as occasional insights into their private lives. But Zuiker could obviously not wholly dispense with physical action and other traditional features of the detective genre. Thus investigators in *CSI Las Vegas* do not only process evidence, which has been secured by police officers, they collect it themselves while investigating at the crime scene. In cooperation with police forces they even conduct raids, pursuit, arrest and interrogate suspects. Although captain Jim Brass of the LVPD is frequently listed among the main cast, he and the police in general play a rather supportive role, while the *CSI* specialists solve most of the cases at the lab.

In reality all activities outside the crime lab fall under the responsibility of the police. Due to their scientific objectivity CSI personnel is usually not involved in detective work, as this could compromise their scientific objectivity. But *CSI Las Vegas* is not the only 'police-procedural' drama, distorting police procedure. Actually most contemporary crime series break this rule and even British shows like *Silent Witness* (BBC, 1996-) received heavy criticism from police and district attorneys, concerning the unrealistic depiction of police investigations. (cf. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/CSI:_Crime_Scene_Investigation; July 19, 2010)

Also the *CSI* team’s far-fetched reconstruction of certain events in the past, as well as the application of futuristic and occasionally invented scientific methods have raised jury member’s and victim’s expectations of forensics beyond their real-life possibilities, influencing even the way cases are presented in court. While in reality crime lab analysis take days or even weeks, people expect instant results, and district attorneys claim, that the influence of such series goes so far that conviction rates in jury cases with little forensic evidence (although there may be enough other evidence) have dropped considerably. (cf. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/CSI:_Crime_Scene_Investigation; July 19, 2010)

Many film critics saw this slick and glossy new series with reservation, e.g. Andrew Billen wrote: “when DNA analysis became common, some crime writers feared for the genre, lest science made every case instantly open and shut, replacing human drama with the drama of science works.” (cited by Goode 2007:
Indeed, in most CSI episodes, human drama seems to play a secondary role, while dramatic focus lies on the scientific investigation and the reconstruction of the murder. Considering the detail with which the brutal crimes are staged, it is only natural and definitely part of the concept, that the social context, especially the information about the victims, is rather reduced.

2.2.4 A Formalistic Analysis of the Televisual Qualities of CSI

Film making requires close cooperation between producers, film directors, authors, editors, camera teams, art directors, sound designers, costume designers, IT specialists, continuity advisors, graphic designers, actors,... The following sub-chapters will deal with the three major aspects of film making: mise-en-scène, camera work and editing, which are closely linked and partially overlapping.

2.2.4.1 Mise-en-Scène

According to Jeremy G. Butler, professor of Film Studies at the Northwestern University, the term ‘mise-en-scène’ refers to “everything that can be seen on the screen”. This includes the organization and composition of “setting, props, costumes, lighting, and actor movement” (1994: 101). Trying to analyze the visual style of CSI, I will first describe the mise-en-scène, focusing on the overall feel and composition of the show, and then go into techniques Anthony E. Zuiker and his team use to realize his idea of starring science in a crime series.

As already mentioned in the first chapter, contemporary U.S. ‘quality’ television attempts to draw attention to the mediation of the narrative, creating “excessive, visually exhibitionist and cinematic” televisual styles. (Caldwell 1995: 110) Trying to set CSI apart from other crime series, Zuiker introduced a new concept of dramatizing crimes and their reconstruction by the CSI team. Focusing on science as a new means of investigation, he created an innovative series ‘bible’, defining narrative arcs, continuities of characters, settings, and developed a distinct and aesthetically ambitious visual style, fictionalizing forensics.

The series has indeed set new standards in television aesthetics in the crime genre, making science and self-consciously wrought mise-en-scène a generic component of modern police procedural drama. According to Jonathan Bignell, Professor of Television and Film Studies, this type of series necessarily addresses issues of seeing and knowing. (Bignell in McCabe, Akass 2007: 160) This becomes obvious in Zuiker’s use of long scenes, showing CSI members deeply absorbed in their work, examining crimes scenes, dead bodies, and pieces of evidence in the lab, stressing their professionalism, persistence and efficiency.

Two recurring types of aesthetically ambitious scenes form the basis of the series’ visual style. The first type is set at the crime scene, depicting the CSI team’s closely scrutinizing of dead bodies and surfaces using optical or medical forensic devices. The second type is set at the morgue or the crime lab, showing processes of autopsy, and visualizing analysis of DNA, fingerprints, bullets, clothing fibres, skin cells and other fragments.
Displaying the incorruptible precision of their high-tech equipment, Zuiker emphasizes the importance of the applied technology and methodology. In order to show, how the series' narration is built around these scientific activities and processes, the following lines provide some examples, taken from the first season.

In 'Blood Drops' (season 1, episode 7) Gil Grissom investigates at a supposed crime scene, searching for blood residue on a maple floor, which he thinks has been painted to disguise traces of a murder. Hoping to detect small amounts of blood, he decides to apply Luminol on the surface. The chemical substance is frequently used at crime scenes, as it reacts with the iron found in hemoglobin and exhibits a striking blue glow, which can be seen in darkened rooms. (cf. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Luminol; July 28, 2010)

But in this case the test is negative, which makes Grissom suppose that potential blood stains could have been covered and enclosed by the fresh layer of wood varnish on the floor. (cf. Goode in McCabe, Akass 2007: 125) Thus he decides to use ALS (alternative light source) and special glasses, which enable him to discover organic traces invisible to the human eye. This method proves successful and the ALS illuminates blood residue (more precisely, the protein molecules in it) enclosed under the varnish. From form and distribution of the blood stains, Grissom reconstructs the crime verbally. His interpretation is supported by high-contrast flashbacks, showing details of the murder and illustrating the circumstances under which the traces were spread in this way.
(cf. Goode in McCabe, Akass 2007: 125)

Figure 2.4: Screenshots showing Grissom and Sarah applying Alternative Light Sources

It is this in particular the procedure of detection, collection and analysis of evidence, using an array of forensic techniques, which creates the drama of the series. Apart from knowledge and experience, such investigations require the CSI team to use all their senses, from smell and touch to vision and hearing. Limited by the medium, all of these processes have to be conveyed audiovisually, so e.g. the smell of decaying corpses is frequently visualized by the presence of insects or by showing its source in close-ups, using astonishingly realistic dummies or applying special make-up on actors, and having even the toughest CSI examiners display or express their disgust.

Figure 2.5: Screenshots of CSI scenes depicting decaying corpses

Scenes depicting processes of autopsy, present another important aspect of the generic iconography of CSI. E.g. in 'Sex, Lies and Larvae' (season 1, episode
10), the dead and disfigured body of an unidentified woman is examined. She has been shot in the head and disposed in the mountains. The coroner Dr. Al Robbins (Robert David Hall) rarely appears in scenes outside the autopsy room, where he dedicates himself to the dissection of dead bodies. Grissom and Sarah are present, and based on the results of the examination, Robbins reports on the causes of death. (cf. Goode in McCabe, Akass 2007: 126)

The dramatic effect of his diagnostic findings is illustrated and intensified by close-ups of the woman's injuries and the injection of visual effects, showing how a bullet penetrates her flesh and bones. This way of dramatizing the moment of death from an anatomical perspective, alternates with cuts to Grissom, Sidle and Robbins' clinical gaze and examination of the body. (cf. Goode 2007: 126)

Helping to restage crimes in the moment they are reconstructed by CSI members, such flashbacks and computer animated corporal images form an important part of the series' visual style and narrative concept. (cf. Goode in McCabe, Akass 2007: 126) But, although these techniques match the beyond state of the art technology featured in the series, the presentation of nude, deformed or decayed corpses as well as the visualization of their interiors may raise questions of good taste and human dignity.

Developed and introduced by Zuiker and Bruckheimer, the technique of re-animating the moment of death is also called 'CSI shot'. Accompanied by the examiners' comments, monologues or dialogues, their theories are visualized, even if they sometimes prove wrong. In 'Sex Lies and Larvae' the 'CSI shot' starts with a close-up of the hole in the victim's head, which is followed by a fast cut to a macro-photographic shot of a bullet fired from a gun. Next the viewer observes the murder from the perspective of the bullet, as the camera seems to follow it on its way through the woman’s head, piercing her flesh, bone and brain, leaving a big exit wound on the other side of her face. Such scenes are frequently interrupted by short explanatory sequences featuring computer-animated prosthetic models showing the exact course of the bullet, giving even its entrance and exit angle. (cf. Goode in McCabe, Akass 2007: 126) The microscopic and magnified visual presentation of the shot to the head asks for a temporal slow down of the animation, which gives room for more detail. The kinetic effect of the bullet’s movement links the sequences despite the fast cuts and rapid change between staged and simulated scenes. In addition the accompanying dialogue holds up the pace of narration. (cf. Goode in McCabe, Akass 2007: 126)
Figure 2.7: Screenshots of typical 'CSI shots'
The characters’ shared forensic gaze at the corpse also serves to display the scientific specialization and knowledge of each team member. At first Dr. Robbins tells Grissom and Sara that he sent the victim’s fingerprints to homicide for identification, and that she had died immediately after being shot through the head. Then the camera observes Sarah in a long close-up, while she is looking at the entry wound. Scrutinizing the edge of the wound, she concludes that the gun must have been fired from a very short distance, which makes her suppose that it was an intimate killing. Dr. Robbins supports this theory, stating that her x-rays show multiple facial fractures and that such injuries are typical for battered women. As the fractures are partially healed, he assumes them to be the result of a long term abusive relationship.

Grissom’s job is to determine how long the woman has been dead. He is a specialist in entomology and has already collected all kinds of insects at the crime scene. He takes a close look at the body and finds a muscat fly in the flesh, stating that these flies only come from urban areas, and do not live in the wood, where her body was found. This proves Sarah’s initial assumption, that she wasn’t killed where she was found, and that the murderer just dumped her there because he was too much in a hurry to bury her.

To find out the exact time of death Grissom decides to examine four beetles, which he has extracted from the dead body. His enthusiasm for insects becomes obvious, when he names them John, Paul, George and Ringo. Sara asks him to explain how he pinpoints the time of death, and he says he watches them mature and then counts backwards. From the presence of certain species, their quantity, size and age, he is able to determine the place and time of death.

But also the specific use of light and colour contributes to the feel of an image or scene. In CSI the body becomes a site of the crime, and the laboratories as well as the autopsy room are designed to intensify the forensic gaze and highlight the anatomy of the victim and the crime. Hitting certain surfaces, no matter if it is the white skin of the corpse, the dark red of flesh or dried blood, the blue hygienic clothing of the examiners, or the cold metal of the autopsy table, the presence or absence of light and colour helps to create and convey a certain atmosphere, which is an important aspect of the series’ ambitious visual style.

The cold and dead atmosphere in the dissecting room is both supported and contrasted by the faces of the CSI team. Their serious demeanor and scientific approach to the body on the slab add to the impression of lifelessness. Still the textures of their faces, their eyes, lips and hair add warm colours and also their dialogue and movements distinguish them from the silent, pale and motionless corpse, contrasting death with life.

Using single camera technique, which allows more elaborate camera movement in order to exploit point of view as much as possible, Zuiker makes sure that each shot can be lit individually. Finally post-production and editing can harmonize the film material by various grading processes and extensive computer manipulation, which offers possibilities to visual experimentation using filters or greater depth of colour as well as contrastive lightening. (cf. Bignell in McCabe, Akass 2007: 161).
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Figure 2.8: Screenshot showing Grissom categorizing the insects collected from a corpse

Figure 2.9: Examples of the specific use of light and colour in CSI autopsy scenes
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2.2.4.2 Camera Work, its Psychological Dimensions and Narrative Agency

The exploitation of contemporary mise-en-scène in combination with innovative camera techniques offers film makers new ways to distinguish their narratives visually from others. In earlier times, police series stuck to a much more standardized 'filmic' realization, putting special emphasis on physical action or star performance. (cf. Bignell in McCabe, Akass 2007: 161)

Particularly in the 1970s long-running detective series like e.g. *Columbo* and *Kojak* (CBS 1973-1978) followed these conventions. These shows were built around performers and characters, while the stories used to highlight specific catchphrases or moments of performance, and camera work, lighting, props, setting, and costumes were supposed to support them. But, although some exceptional shows like e.g. *The Rockford Files* (NBC 1974-1989) or *Quincy M.E.* (NBC 1976-1983) offered a more experimental mise-en-scène (cf. Bignell in McCabe, Akass 2007: 161), neither film technique nor the audience allowed these series to exploit visual style in the way *CSI* does today.

In order to analyze the series' extravagant camerawork and the intentions behind it, it is important to distinguish the different types of shots and their psychological effects. While the size and length of a shot shape the viewers' perception of a scene, filming the action from a certain distance, angle or point of view influences how involved the audience gets.

So, a 'long shot' ('distant shot') indirectly depicts where an action takes place, observing a character while he or she moves in space and reacts to his environment. Watching the events from a certain distance, makes the audience feel safe and detached from what is happening on screen. (cf. Creeber 2006: 39)

'Medium shots', 'head-and-shoulders shots' and particularly close-ups of characters' faces or eyes, produce a feeling of intimacy and a spacial 'closeness', adding to the viewer's emotional involvement in the events on screen. Similarly, a 'point-of-view shot', allows the audience to see the scene through the eyes of a certain character, which may add to the viewers' identification with that person. (cf. Creeber 2006: 39)

If the shot is taken from a high angle ('high-angle shot'), which makes the viewer look down on the action, it will give him or her a feeling of power over what is going on. A 'low-angle' shot has the opposite effect, creating a sense of intimidation and inferiority among the viewers, while an 'eye-level shot' may support moments of empathy. (cf. Creeber 2006: 39)

All these psychological effects can be enforced by the use of different types of lenses. A common standard-lens shot delivers depth of field and proportions similar to the human eye, whereas wide-angle or tele-photo lenses offer completely different dimensions of depth and perspective. So, e.g. Zuiker and his team applying film techniques that magnify the wounds and other details of the human body. (Goode in McCabe, Akass 2007: 127) Particularly telephoto-lens shots of character's skin are frequently used to create a certain sense of voyeurism. (cf. Creeber 2006: 39)

Similarly, the specific use of camera focus can create a specific mood. 'Deep-focus' shots show everything in the same focus and create a realistic atmosphere. 'Soft focus' on the other hand is frequently used for romantic scenes, as sharp contrasts and lines are blurred. In *CSI* it is also applied in 'point-of-view shots',

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*Note: *The above text is a natural language representation of the content, ensuring a coherent and logical flow of information.
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Figure 2.10: 'Long shot' (top left), 'medium shot' (top right), 'head-and-shoulders shot' (center left), close-up (center right), 'high-angle shot' (down left), 'low-angle shot' (down right)

Figure 2.11: Examples of tele-photo shots in CSI
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Figure 2.12: Examples of deep focus (top left), soft focus (top right), selective focus (down left) shots in CSI

conveying e.g. the dizziness of people under medication or injured victims. 'Selective focus' (shallow focus) is usually employed to direct the viewers attention to a certain action, person or object, which is shown in focus, while other parts of the scene are out of focus. (cf. Creeber 2006: 39)

Furthermore, the use of a specific camera and film type will influence the feel and style of a scene. So, compared to a camera attached to a crane or supported by wheels, a hand-held camera or a steadycam strapped to an object will deliver a completely different quality of film, giving it a realistic or documentary look. In terms of film material, grainy picture or bleached out colour are frequently used to date back certain events. (cf. Creeber 2006: 39f.) E.g. in Cold Case (CBS, 2003-2010) Maredith Stiehm uses such techniques to indicate shifts in time and space. Scenes depicting long gone murders and flashbacks showing the victims still alive are of course signalled by historical settings, props and costume, but it is actually a sudden fade of colour and the bad quality of picture, which adds a certain feel and authenticity, clearly marking the beginning and end of the sequence.

Finally camera modes like slow motion or fast motion are frequently used to depict (accelerate or slow down) chemical procedures or processes of decay, e.g. how nature (coyotes or insects) reconquers a dead body in the wood. Particularly in 'CSI shots' these modes are combined with the 'zoom in' and 'zoom out' function, allowing the viewer e.g. to follow the bullet through the body of the victim.

Also the length of takes influences the way scenes are perceived. Long takes privilege actors’ performance, allowing the viewer to take a long look at somebody or something and the space around it. Passing a part of the interpretative
authority to the audience, they enforce our concentration on character’s behavior or details in their surroundings, like e.g. a picture on the wall behind, by which they reveal themselves. (cf. Bignell in McCabe, Akass 2007: 164)

More conventional series (also Columbo or Miami Vice) stick to a different style of character representation, based on a sequence of rapid alternations of

... shot-reverse-shot and close-up, which segment the human body and the relationship between characters and space and determine how the viewer can perceive action and character differently. The selection and segmentation of rapid cutting and extensive close-up can be analytical, representing aural interpretations of character and action. (Bignell in McCabe, Akass 2007: 164)

While this form of segmented shooting leaves no ‘dead space’ for individual interpretation, the long takes offer the audience a different and more subjective way of making sense of the people and events on screen. This can be linked to the Brechtian theory that viewers can choose, where to look at and must actively try to interpret the images and information they gather from the observed. (cf. Bignell in McCabe, Akass 2007: 164f.)

The Narrative Agency of the Camera Much of CSI’s cinematic look stems from methods that magnify and expose the details of surfaces of objects or bodies. Emphasizing innovative film style, the camera seems to force characters, corpses and objects to reveal their secrets. But, apart from “creating a spectacle of surfaces” (Goode in McCabe, Akass 2007: 127), the main function of such close-ups and zooms is to connect the narrative agency of the camera with the investigators’ agency of gathering knowledge about the case. Stressing their professionalism and matching the scientific motto ’seeing is knowing’, the camera is constantly imitating, sometimes supplementing and explaining their gaze and activities (cf. Bignell in McCabe, Akass 2007: 165).

Compared to other police series, in CSI, the relative lack of physical action and reticence in scenes showing the investigators deeply absorbed in their work, are contrasted and compensated by the movement and revelation of the camera, which also links the present with the past. While the present is characterized by the stillness of the laboratory and the literary stillness of the dead bodies or certain objects, the evidence gathered by the criminalists is used to reconstruct the crimes and the camera reveals the past. (cf. Bignell in McCabe, Akass 2007: 165) This is done with the help of flashbacks, which bring in the necessary movement and passion, depicting the victim still alive or in the moment of death.

Also CGI (Computer Generated Imagery) and prosthetic models are used to restage the causes and effects of the person’s injuries, or in what way pieces of evidence are linked to the case. (cf. Bignell in McCabe, Akass 2007: 165) Building much of his series’ visual style on realistic and spectacular animations, Zuiker http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/CSI:_Crime_Scene_Investigation; September 7, 2010)

By showing, how ‘seeing’ leads to ‘knowing’, the camera assists the criminalists to reconstruct the past from the present. “What is seen in the here-and-now is explained by another form of seeing, that projects a history onto it.”(Bignell in McCabe, Akass 2007: 165) But, trying to reconstruct the puzzle of a murder from a few pieces, it frequently happens, that the criminalists and thus also the camera are misled by the present pieces of evidence.
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Thus flashbacks or analytical computer animations frequently reoccur with an update, presenting their new findings and visualizing how they fit into the case. Chronicling the investigators’ thoughts and progress, this technique allows to stage the changes in their theories on the case as well as the anatomy of the crime, giving the series a kind of documentary quality.

The whole visual stylishness of the series is based on the investigative, supportive and explanatory agency of the camera, which allows CSI to make forensics exciting and to replace hard boiled detectives with scientific personnel, who solve crimes in the lab. Above all, the excessive visualization of the crime and the process of its reconstruction helps to present the investigators as heroes, doing justice to the liveless bodies on the slabs by giving them back their stories.

2.2.4.3 Editing

Heavily dependent on the quality of camera work and film material, editing plays an essential part in how the audience perceives or interprets a film. Though in most of the cases editing is part of the post-production, it can also be done live (in sitcoms or newscasts), or outside the studio (in sport or reality formats), which usually requires more than one camera, to make sure that there is enough footage.

The process is responsible for transforming the gathered film footage into a narrative, involving heroes, villains, several storylines, cliffhangers or a suitable ending. This is done by assembling takes and scenes in a way, that provides enough information and coherency for the viewer to follow the story. Selecting the action, which the film director considers as relevant, the editor constructs the narrative on the screen. (cf. Creeber 2006: 41)

In order to create a narrative arc, he puts scenes in an order that presents the plot in a chronological, a-chronological, or completely random form, depending on how much the viewer’s concentration should be challenged. E.g. the continuity editing (chronological editing) in Big Brother (Channel 4 1999-2010) follows the lives of the people in the house 24 hours a day, which requires only little supplementing or explanatory activity of the viewer.

In the movie Memento (2000) by Christopher Nolan, the events unfold in two separate, alternating narratives — one is depicted in color, and the other in black and white. The black and white story is told in chronological order, while the colored sequences are in reversed order. Portraying a few days in the life of Leonard Shelby, a man suffering from short-term memory amnesia, the complex narration imitates the way the man finds out and forgets about the things that led to his present state. Being confronted with the main character’s (and narrator’s) limited perception of the events, the audience is permanently forced to concentrate and actively reconstruct the story. Finally, when the two narratives converge, the puzzle is complete. (cf. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Memento_(film); August 11, 2010)

Pulp Fiction (Quentin Tarantino 1994) is a famous example of random editing. Narrating three partially overlapping storylines, telling about Vincent Vega, a hitman, Butch Coolidge, a prizefighter, and Jules Winnfield, a contract killer. Tarantino keeps the viewer in a constant state of confusion as the narration appears to be cut in pieces, and reassembled completely out of order. Due to Tarantino’s extensive use of pastiche, its extreme graphic violence and punchy dialogue, the film has gained cult status.
Editorial Manipulation  Much of our sympathy or resentments towards the hero or villain of a film stems from the way the person is portrayed, what is staged and what is left out, and how shots and scenes are composed. E.g. cutting between scenes from the present and the past is frequently used to provide important information about characters, which helps to foreground certain things or explain their current behavior and feelings.

E.g. in Rambo (1982), film director Ted Kotcheff manages to present an ex-soldier, who loses control and kills several people with military arms, as hero and tragic victim. Interrupting shots depicting how Rambo is arrested and brutalized by the Sheriff and his deputies, with flashbacks of his traumatic war experience in Vietnam, Kotchoff justifies the veteran’s extremely violent reaction. Close-ups of his terrified eyes and the sadistic look of the deputies alternate with medium range shots depicting their physical action against the unyielding captive.

The sequence is clearly aimed to illustrate and explain how and why Rambo slowly loses control. Showing how his present situation leads to the coming back of his memories of captivity and torture, the right editing of shots and scenes can reveal a homicidal maniac who wages a guerrilla war against the Sheriff and the National Guard, as a traumatized Vietnam war veteran and after all, a cornered victim, who cannot be blamed.

Suspense and Surprise  But editing is also responsible to create tension. Alfred Hitchcock has been frequently called the master of suspense, but actually he was a gifted camera man and editor. His recognizable directorial style is based on his distinct use of the camera and sequencing of scenes. He wanted the camera to mimic a person’s gaze, forcing the viewers to engage in a form of voyeurism. “Framing shots to manipulate the feelings of the audience and maximize anxiety, fear, and empathy, he used innovative film editing to demonstrate the point of view of the characters.”(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alfred_Hitchcock; August 15, 2010)

In the famous ‘shower scene’ in Psycho (1960), he depicted the murder of Marion Crane (Janet Leigh), using an impressive number of editing tricks to make the audience tremble. At the beginning of the scene, a series of close-ups and medium range shots show the unsuspecting woman, enjoying a warm shower. The viewer feels like an invisible observer standing next to Marion in the tub, but, as Hitchcock saw more tension in those things which are left out,
the camera shows only her head and her shoulders, her arms and legs. These shots alternate with close-ups of the shower head, which are obviously imitating the victim’s perspective, holding her face into the water jet. Then her face slowly moves out of center of the observer’s view, focusing on something moving behind the shower curtain. The victim stands with her back to the bathroom door and remains unaware of the threatening danger, while the camera, like somebody paralyzed by fear, fixes on the dark shadow behind her. It is exactly this difference in knowledge and perspective, which makes up Hitchcock’s suspense pattern.

Due to the camera’s position, the audience sees and knows more than the woman, watching the person behind the shower curtain come closer and being unable to warn her. It is the thriller-genre with its learned story patterns, Hitchcock’s use of the camera and the shower curtain and above all the special editing of the scene, which lets the audience suspect an act of violence, and the suspense is actually created by making the viewer foresee, wait and watch the unknowing victim being attacked.

But Hitchcock was also a master of surprise, which is another important effect of editing. Considering the fact, that Marion Leight appears like one of Hitchcock’s typical female main characters, nobody expects her to die so early in the film. In a previous scene Anthony Bates, the hotel owner, watched her undressing through a whole in the wall. By inserting this scene, Hitchcock tricks the audience into suspecting Bates to be the aggressor behind the curtain, planning to rape her. But the long and intense moment of suspense described above, is even excelled by the following moment of surprise, when the victim is brutally murdered by a woman, the Bates’ mother.

So, editing is a form of narrating a story, guiding the viewers through the plot, sharpening or limiting their perception of certain events by the way scenes are selected and assembled. Providing the audience with the right information in the right moment, anticipating and contravening their expectations, editors and film directors need to know much about audience psychology and mood management, which is crucial to create tension and moments of surprise.

Editing and the Increasing Information Density  While in the pre-‘quality’ era, editors had much more time (up to 60 min. episode length) to narrate one or two story lines, the complex and multi-layered plot structure of contemporary series continually forces them to develop new strategies to convey an ever-growing amount of information within the common 40 min. episode format.

Two editing techniques have become particularly important: ‘Fast cutting’ and ‘cross cutting’. Frequently employed to speed up the narration, they have also changed the feel and the visual style of modern TV-Shows and Hollywood movies.

‘Fast cutting’ refers to the quick succession of ‘several consecutive shots of a brief duration (e.g. 3 seconds or less), which can be used to convey a lot of information very quickly, or to imply either energy or chaos in a scene. The technique is frequently used when shooting dialogue between two or more characters, changing the viewer’s perspective to either focus on the reaction of the listening character, or to bring to attention the non-verbal actions of the speaking character.” http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fast_cutting; August 21, 2010)
Another important effect of fast cutting is to create movement on screen, as a sequence of fast cuts, occasionally shot with a hand-held and shaking camera, produces a feeling of fast movement and live action. Zuiker and his team use such rapid sequences in flashbacks depicting the murder, emphasizing the brutality of the act. But also CSI shots are usually composed of fast cuts (see Figure 2.7 on page 59), as the rapid cutting does not allow a detailed viewing or scanning of the images, which makes it difficult and sometimes impossible for the human eye, to distinguish between computer-generated imagery and filmed material.

Particularly TV series with their run on story lines apply this technique to sum up what happened so far, accelerating the narration by sequencing short and informative shots. Also their title sequences are usually a short series of fast cuts, introducing the main characters and showing the main settings. But rapid sequences can also be applied to speed up the narration of less important action, which is still relevant for the coherency of the plot. Zuiker uses this technique e.g. to depict time-consuming crime scene investigations, or tedious tests and processes in the crime lab.

'Cross cutting' is a device of narrative construction, which is frequently used to depict events that occur at the same time in different places. “The development of two pieces of action are presented simultaneously by intercutting shots from two or more scenes in a way, that fragments of each scene will be alternately presented”. (http://www.zerocut.com/tech/film_terms.html; August 21, 2010). As the CSI criminalists are usually split in two or three teams, each investigating a different crime, ‘cross cutting’ is applied to depict and link the ‘parallel action’. Monitoring what happens simultaneously in the different locations, jumping from the Las Vegas crime lab to the different crime scenes and back, the camera is permanently tracking the teams’ progress and setbacks in the various cases, no matter where they are.

Combining both strategies allows Zuiker and his editors to set new standards in terms of information density and screen action, narrating two to three separate storylines within 43 minutes. Visually and narratively exploiting the moving and thrilling moments of each story, the series shows an exceptional frequency of cross- and fast cuts, challenging the viewers’ eyes and associative abilities.

Considering modern editing, it is obvious that the growing density of information and the cut-frequency seem to rise proportionally. Economizing narratives and trying to create the perfect mix, editors line up scenes that offer visual pleasure, spectacle, action, violence or sex, alternating them with emotional, tragic, reflective or pathetic moments. Less spectacular sequences are roughly reported in dialogue or skipped and left to the viewer’s imagination.

The ASL (Average Shot Length) indicates the average duration of a shot between cuts in a film (total film run time divided by number of shots). It is a data used to compare films according to their shot composition and editing style (how often does an editor cut, how long do the shots last). Generally, the ASL tends to decrease as the viewers’ attention spans get shorter and shorter. While a film from the 1950s to the 1970s might have an ASL of 10 to 12 seconds (also Columbo has an ASL of 10 seconds), modern movies like The Incredibles (Pixar Animations, 2004) or The Matrix (Wachowsky brothers, 1999) have an ASL of only 2 seconds. (cf. http://www.cinemetrics.lv/movie.php?movie_ID=825, September 7, 2010) and http://www.metafilter.com/90102/ Cinemetrics- database -of- Average- Shot- Length; September 7, 2010)
2.2.4.4 Sound and Music

While Columbo and Hitchcock thrillers featured traditional orchestral film music and partially dispensed with background music to heighten the suspense with a biting silence (see shower scene Psycho), CSI, like most contemporary series, features modern pop music. The series’ theme song is ‘Who are you?’, written by Pete Townsend with vocals by Roger Daltrey of The Who. The original idea was to have a theme song written, which is much cheaper than buying the licenses and paying the fee rates to the author and interpret. But the cast liked ‘Who are you?’, and as Townsend was impressed by the pilot, he agreed on a special deal with Bruckheimer. Thus even the show’s spin-offs feature theme songs from The Who: ‘Won’t Get Fooled Again’ for CSI Miami and ‘Baba O’Riley’ for CSI NY. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/CSI:_Crime_Scene_Investigation#Music; September 22, 2010)

Similar to other Jerry Bruckheimer productions like e.g. Cold Case, CSI features background music with a-symphonic tone colour, mixing elements of pop and rock, metal and funk. Strictly avoiding traditional orchestra music with chorus, the series’ soundtrack features synthetic sounds, heavy beats and fast rhythms to intensify the action on screen. Particularly scenes without dialogue, that show the CSI team scrutinizing crime scenes, or absorbed in forensic tests at the lab, are supported by fast-paced drum and base tracks. Trying to make up for the lack of events, Bruckheimer fills the gaps with high-pitched and comparatively loud music. E.g. Moguai, Radiohead and Cocteau Twins provided songs for such sequences. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/CSI:_Crime_Scene_Investigation#Music; September 22, 2010)

But drum and base is not only used to produce acoustic movement, it also has a symbolic meaning. Programmed on computers and based almost exclusively on electronic sounds it stands for modern technology and our fast-paced life. Having its origins in rave music, drum and base emerged in the late 1990s. The genre can be characterized as dance floor music with fast breakbeats (typically between 160–190 bpm (beats per minute), combined with heavy bass and sub-bass lines. (cf. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Drum_and_bass; September 22, 2010)

Creating an extravagant sound mix, depending on what kind of atmosphere should be created, Bruckheimer features also songs by Rammstein, and Marilyn Manson. Particularly emotional scenes are supported by sad songs by Sigur Rós, John Mayer and Gary Jules, but also The Turtles, Nine Inch Nails and numerous other artists have made their way on the CSI soundtrack. The Wallflowers, John Mayer, and Akon (with Obie Trice) have even appeared and performed in episodes. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/CSI:_Crime_Scene_Investigation#Music; September 22, 2010)

2.2.4.5 Episode Structure and Ideological Codes

Contrary to the inverted detective story pattern of Columbo, CSI is based on the ‘Who dunit’ principle. Thus Zuiker makes frequent use of cold openings, e.g. starting his episodes with a scene depicting the victim still alive, going to bed or meeting with friends, which is followed by a “jump cut” (an abrupt, contrastive cut) to the crime scene, where he or she is found dead. But occasionally he skips this ‘intro’ and jumps into the story at the point when the victim is found
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dead or even later, when the CSI team arrives at the crime scene.

This cold opening of about two to five minutes is followed by a thirty seconds title sequence. The title sequences change from season to season, but basically they all follow the same pattern, featuring fast cuts of the main characters in action, introducing them and showing their special scientific skills. The short takes are combined with stylish shots of Las Vegas, the sky line, the casinos, and other images conveying the extravagance of the city.

Las Vegas is presented as ‘Sin City’, corrupted by casino bosses, pimps, drug cartels and other criminal organizations and although frequently too late to save the victims, the CSI and the Las Vegas Police fight for justice. Throughout each episode, Zuiker depicts them scrutinizing crime scenes and securing pieces of evidence, examining the dead bodies of the victims in dissecting rooms, testing, reconstructing and analyzing pieces of evidence in the crime lab, testifying as experts in court, and assisting the police in searching homes, interviewing witnesses and arresting suspects.

Panorama or fast-motion takes of Las Vegas are important recurring visual elements, which continually remind the viewer of the money and danger in the streets, particularly when the narration switches from one case or storyline to another. These short sequences feature images of the boom town, the casinos, the streets and the desert, usually ending with the camera zooming in on the next location. This device allows Zuiker to set the following scene in a spacial and temporal context, e.g. by featuring the Las Vegas skyline at night, he indicates the time, and zooming in on a hotel (see Figure 2.14 on page 71), a gloomy backstreet or an underground parking, he shows where the next scene is going to take place.

Even the ending of CSI episodes follows a rather simple but effective pattern. No matter if the team is able to solve the major crimes and arrest the ‘bad boys’, or formal mistakes and luck allows them to get away, the majority of episode endings has a reflective touch. As the crimes are already committed and the victims are dead anyway, the investigators can only try to bring delayed gratification and peace to the bereaved. This is staged by the final act of ‘releasing’ the corpses to be buried or burned. Usually there remain some unanswered questions to bother the investigators. In a last cross-cut, showing how the characters go on after closing the case, the camera sums up the feelings of the team and fades to black. Thus also the final scenes and the following 30 seconds credits feature mostly melancholic music, or the theme song ‘Who are you?’.
Criminal Cases: So usually episodes start with a major crime (mostly a murder), which is later followed by one or two other crimes or incidents like e.g. kidnapping, theft, rape, bomb attacks, fires, car accidents, or another murder. According to their severity, the cases have different priority, which is also reflected in the way these storylines are presented. In the majority of episodes, top priority is given to a murder case, which makes up the biggest part of the 43 minutes narration. The rest of the airtime goes to the second and third case.

E.g. in ‘Sex, Lies and Larvae’ (season 1, episode 7), Grissom and Sara investigate the murder of a young woman found in the woods (see story A in Figure 2.15 on page 72), while Catherine and Warrick deal with the theft of a painting, which turns out to be a forgery (see story B). Nick stokes searches a missing woman, who has only disappeared to be with her lover (see story C). Top priority goes to Grissom and Sara’s case, which is indicated by the detailed narration of this storyline, while Catherine and Warrick’s comes next, and the least airtime goes to Nick’s case.

As the various crimes with their diverse context and evidence ask for certain specialists to be solved, Grissom tends to form individual teams from his pool of scientists. Thus the major crimes are investigated alternately by different characters who take the lead in this episode. Constructing and arranging the cases in a certain way, Zuiker continually recombines the lead characters, which also opens up new space for interpersonal problems, character stories and dialogue (see Character stories).

The different cases of an episode are occasionally related. E.g. in ‘The Theory of Everything’ (season 8, episode 15), where several seemingly unrelated deaths and incidents can be traced back to a jewelry-maker who used cyanide to kill the squirrels in her backyard, which also killed her neighbor’s cat, shortly before one of the poisoned animals chewed on a wire, causing a fire which created some hydrogen cyanide gas, which killed the neighbors, ...

In general all cases are solved within one episode, while character stories run on and develop the season-plot. But particularly in cases involving serial killings or crimes afflicting CSI members, the investigations might span two or several
episodes. In 'One to Go I and II' (season 9, episode 9 and 10) Grissom and his team solve the “Dick & Jane” serial murders, in 'Living Doll' and 'Dead Doll' (season 7, episode 24 and season 8, episode 1), they finally catch the “Miniature killer”, but not before a member of CSI becomes her final victim.

With such exceptional two- or multi-part episodes Zuiker breaks the routine, firstly by confronting the viewers with a cliffhanger instead of resolving the case at the end of part one, and secondly by skipping the usual second or third story line, to make room for one major case which occupies the whole department. Consequently, instead of a cold open, the subsequent episode starts with a short summary of what has happened so far, followed by the title sequence.

Another deviation from the '2 or 3-case-episode structure' are single episodes, in which time pressure or the severity of a crime requires all team members to work together on one case. E.g. in 'Blood Drops' (season 1, episode 7) the whole CSI team investigates a gruesome family massacre in a suburban neighborhood and in 'The Unusual Suspect' (season 6, episode 18), after a sudden confession of the suspect’s younger sister, the judge gives the prosecution five days to re-examine the case and check their evidence, before the jury decides.

Occasionally Grissom and his team make mistakes, which are usually caused by ignorance, carelessness or personal involvement of CSI members. In a very small number of cases, the murder gets away because evidence has been spoiled or collected or stored under false conditions, and the law or sometimes even biased jury members prevent the guilty from being punished.

Finally the series offers several cross-episodes with it’s spin off fellows CSI New York and CSI Miami. E.g. in 'Cross-Jurisdictions' (Season 2, Episode 22), Grissom and his crew handle a high profile case, trying to find the murder of a former chief of detectives, who has also kidnapped his wife and daughter. His traces lead Warrick and Catherine to Miami, where they solve the case jointly with Horatio Caine, the head of CSI department of Miami.

Character stories: As mentioned above, compared to other contemporary series, CSI Las Vegas is much less about the motives and commission of the crimes, than the process of solving them. Still, typical for modern series, it shows a tendency to mix and diversify the characters’ professional life with their private or inter-personal problems. Thus Zuiker frequently offers additional character storylines, dealing with relationships or private issues of one or two team members, which sometimes span several episodes.

Usually affairs, alcohol, gaming, family problems, breach of professional rules and disagreements among colleagues disturb the work atmosphere and in the majority of cases Grissom is the one, who addresses problems or settles disputes. In general he is patient and very supportive of his staff, appealing to their professionalism, but if the excellent reputation and efficiency of the department is in danger, he does not hesitate to force a solution, or at least ban their problems from their work place.

So for example in 'Sex, Lies and Larvae', Grissom asks Sarah to look into Warrick, who is suspected of having gambled on duty while pretending to testify in court. But he is also worried about Sarah, who is getting more and more biased concerning the murder she is currently investigating. She tells him that she hears the dead woman’s screams at night, waking up tangled in her blanket. She wants to be the victim’s voice, but lacks the necessary evidence to prove
that her abusive husband killed the woman. Grissom warns her not to crunch evidence to fit her theory.

Also the second team has some private issues to talk about: Warrick got a visit from the Children’s service who asked him a lot of questions about Catherine, her job and her qualities as mother. Catherine, who has recently been divorced, is afraid of losing the custody of her daughter. Finally Nick Stokes has to investigate together with a police detective, he 'forgot' to call after dating her a few weeks ago.

Due to the incredible brutality of certain cases, emotional involvement and subjectivity, are recurring themes, as the team members are frequently confronted with personal or professional moral dilemmas. They are bound by the law and rules of forensics and being heavily dependent on clear evidence, the district attorney, the judge and the jury, they are not always able to do justice to the victims.

In several episodes character stories become major cases, particularly when team members get personally involved, attacked or wounded. So e.g. in 'Grave Danger I and II', the two part final of season five, while working on a case, Nick Stokes is kidnapped and buried alive. The kidnapper sends a ransom demand and a live video stream of Stokes in his grave and the team must find him before he either dies from the bites of fire ants, or suffocates under 5 feet of dirt.

Nick’s fear and inner struggle, not to shoot himself in his grave represent the core of the narration. His colleagues, horrified by the video stream, desperately attempt to identify the kidnapper and locate the coffin. Although the kidnapper blows himself up, his friends are able to save Nick in the last minute.

All these subplots and narrative elements are carefully knit together, creating an immense information density within each episode, while the main plot of the series (spanning all seasons) develops so slowly that at least the episodes of one season can be broadcasted in arbitrary order.

2.2.4.6 Story Arcs and Information Density, Stimuli Intensity and Stress Level

Following the traces of Alfred Hitchcock, who said “Drama is life with all the boring moments cut out” (cf. Truffaut 1966: 91), CSI’s carefully edited multiple story lines allow Zuiker and Bruckheimer to set new standards in terms of narrative economy. Additionally the series’ elaborate mise-en-scène, together with CGI, modern camera techniques, fast cutting and fast-paced music are designed to intensify the viewer’s experience (stimuli intensity) of what is happening on screen. The increased information density and stimuli intensity result in a higher stress level among viewers. Thus, to many of us Columbo episodes seem to have a rather calming or tiresome effect, while fast-cut CSI episodes may appear exciting and even exhausting.

So, whereas Columbo investigates alone, solving usually one murder in each episode, which involves information about three main characters (him, the murderer, and the victim) and one or two major settings, CSI features a team of lead characters. Up to seven criminalists solve between two and three cases within one episode, which implies, that much more background information about characters and cases has to be provided.

Additionally Columbo episodes last 60 minutes, while CSI sticks to the common 43 minutes series format. Detective Columbo is famous for rarely displaying
stress and doing his work with a certain calmness, which leaves also the viewers comparatively relaxed. Taking his time to play psychological tricks or fool his opponents, his investigations can take weeks.

Trying to create a maximum density of cases and action, Zuiker and Bruckheimer decided to set their series in 'the city that never sleeps'. The fact, that Las Vegas is indeed one of the most crime-ridden cities in the U.S. would also serve as an explanation for the exceptionally close cooperation between the police and the CSI. As most trails run cold within 24 hours, victims die and witnesses disappear or simply forget what they have seen, they are under permanent pressure, working in day and night shifts.

_Columbo_ episodes, with their single plot strain, follow the traditional stress pattern of detective fiction. Figure 2.16 on page 76, diagram 1 shows a schematic single story arc, which would also fit for classic detective series like *Ms. Marple* or *Murder, She Wrote*. Depicting the development of tension with proceeding airtime, the graph starts at a low level and, as the story develops, gradually rises towards the main peak (a particularly important moment and turning point: usually the resolution of the murder) and quickly falls at the end. The main story arc (in black) is the result of a more detailed graph (in red) indicating also the sub-peaks of the story line, which might refer to important findings or red herrings.

Since the 1990s e.g. TV series like *Baywatch* (NBC 1990-2001) and particularly soaps like *Beverly Hills, 90210* (Fox 1990-2000) have featured several time-shifted story-lines. Diagram 2 (Figure 2.16 on page 76) shows an idealized scheme depicting three overlapping graphs, story A, B and C. The red line marks the sequences which are staged, whereas the punctuated parts of the arcs are skipped or implied. In addition, depending on how much of each story should be staged, the editor can abbreviate storylines by starting with a cold open (see story A), or ending the episode with a cliffhanger (see story C).

Zuiker brought this technique to perfection, sequencing several parallel or time-shifted story arcs (with early or delayed peaks) in a way, that moments of little tension in one story line coincide with capturing scenes from another. This allows him to cut from one team's important finding at the crime scene of a murder (case A) to another teams investigation of a theft (Case B), to the examination of a dead body in the lab (case A), to an emotional interview of a suspect at the police department (case B),... (see Figure 2.17 on page 77),

The constant switch between storylines, the permanent change of settings, and the narrative agency of the camera create an incredible amount of movement, which is comparable to an action film. Given a viewer is receptive to this kind of film making, the permanent tension and visual spectacle will clearly shape his or her viewing habits and expectation. Clearly aimed to tie the audience to the screen, CSI’s filmic and narrative realization offers program makers the best chances to acquire a new and regular audience, and maximum flexibility in placing commercial breaks.

**Synopsis of CSI Las Vegas episode 10 season 1: 'Sex, Lies and Larvae'**

The following summary of 'Sex Lies and Larvae' will display the narrative anatomy of a typical _CSI_ episode with respect the elements discussed so far. Showing how it is structured according to time-shifted, irregular story arcs with early or delayed peaks (see Figure 2.17 on page 77), I will describe
Figure 2.16: Diagram 1: Schematic single-story arc of traditional detective series; Diagram 2: Schematic and simplified depiction of three time-shifted story arcs typical of modern series.
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Figure 2.17: Narrative structure typical of CSI episodes (’Sex, Lies and Larvae’), featuring several parallel or time-shifted story arcs with early and delayed peaks.

the single scenes, settings and storylines as well as recurring elements like cold open, flashbacks and team scenes including time specifications.

COLD OPENING:
Case A Scene 1 (a rotten female corpse found in the wood): In the woods, a couple decides on a place to set up their camp. The woman goes off to relieve herself and finds a rotten corpse, covered in bugs. (00:00-00:48)

Case A Scene 2 (crime scene investigations in the wood): Grissom and Sara arrive at the crime scene. The police is already there. Captain Jim Brass of the homicide division tells them, that it looks like a gunshot to the head, although no weapon has been found. Grissom collects several maggots and beetles from the body, calling them “the first witnesses to the crime”. Sara claims that she will never get used to this sight and notes, that the woman was not killed there, but the murderer dumped her there. (00:49-02:25)

TITLE SEQUENCE AND OPENING CREDITS: A sequence of fast cuts depicts Las Vegas, its casinos and streets, slowly zooming towards the outskirts, the desert and the woods. (02:26-02:55)

TEAM SCENE (team meeting at the crime lab, Grissom gives out assignments): While Grissom and Sara investigate the murder of the woman in the woods (Case A), Catherine and Warrick are to look into a possible abduction of a victim named Paul Sorenson (Case B), called in by a Mr. Ziegler. Grissom reminds Warrick of a court date in which he has to testify about the chain of evidence in a case he investigated (character story I). Nick is supposed to find a missing person (Case C), named Sheryl Applegate, who disappeared on her way to L.A. Her husband reported to the police after the car had been found at the bus station. Nick says that she took the bus instead, case solved, but Grissom wants him to treat it as a crime, until the woman is found. (02:56-04:22)

Case B Scene 1 (crime scene investigations and interviews at Mr. Ziegler’s): While Catherine and Warrick approach Mr. Ziegler’s front door, Warrick tells her, that he got a visit from Children’s Services, who asked about Catherine and her daughter Lindsey (character story II). She is upset and tries to explain that this must have been initiated by her ex-husband, who tries to get the right of custody. Mr. Ziegler answers the door and shows them, where the Sorenson,
which turns out to be a painting, was displayed. Mr. Ziegler tells them that he heard a noise when he came downstairs to read, and noticed that the door was open and the security alarm disengaged. **Flashback:** showing how the thief enters the room. Hearing somebody coming downstairs, he tears the painting from the wall and escapes through the door. By the time Mr. Ziegler gets to the room, the man is gone. (end of flashback) To Warrick and Catherine this sounds like an inside job. While they dust for prints Catherine asks Warrick, what the Children’s Service wanted to know about her, but Mr. Ziegler interrupts them with questions. (04:56-06:42)

Case A Scene 3 (autopsy of decayed corpse): At the dissecting room, Dr. Robbins tells Grissom and Sara that he sent the fingerprints of the dead women to homicide for identification, and that she was shot through the head. Sara notices an imprint around the entry wound, concluding that this was an ‘intimate killing’, as the weapon must have been pressed to the head. Dr. Robbins displays the woman’s x-rays, showing facial fractures, a common indication of long-term abuse. Grissom finds a Muscat fly on the woman’s body, which only lives in urban areas, not in the woods where she was found. (06:43-08:22)

Case B Scene 2 (crime scene investigations and interviews at Mr. Ziegler’s): Catherine asks Mr. Ziegler who has access to the house and he answers that only his family members do. Warrick finds a print from an ear where the thief pressed his head to the wall to see if the picture was wired. Although Catherine doubts the evidentiary value, they take a photo to compare it to other ear prints. (08:23-09:08)

Case A Scene 4 (at the crime lab): Sara asks Grissom to explain the insects, and how he pinpoints the time of death. He claims that he can tell the point of death from the type and age of the insects present on or in the body. After identifying the species, he watches them mature from eggs to larvae to adults and then counts the days backwards, which is also called ‘linear regression’. Detective Brass drops in to inform them that the woman has been identified as Kaye Shelton, wife of Scott Shelton and that they lived in the Fremont area. He also notes that their neighbors reported a gun shot five days ago. (09:09-10:36)

Case A Scene 5 (at the police department): They interview Scott Shelton, who claims that he was out of town for the last five days, at a convention in New Orleans, and when he came back his wife was gone. He did not report her missing because he supposed, she had left him again. Brass brings up the neighbors who heard a woman scream and a gunshot, but Shelton says, that it was probably the TV. Being confronted with the facial fractures of his wife and past restraining orders against him, Scott claims that Kaye was wild, and he frequently had to defend himself. Sara wants to get a warrant to search his house, but he offers them to take a look. (10:37-12:28)

Case C Scene 1 (at the bus terminal): Nick and Detective Secula meet there by chance. She is irritated because he did not phone her, after their last date. He claims that he was busy, but planned to call her soon. They take a look at the car of the missing woman and Nick finds some hair on a seat which matches her hair color. Noting, that the car seems a little bit too clean, he has it towed to the lab. (12:29-13:52)

Case B Scene 3 (at the Ziegler’s house): Catherine tells the family that someone inside the house shut off the alarm and that the ear print is like a fingerprint. They take prints from the whole family, dust them and compare them to the one on the wall. After a few minutes they have a match with Mr.
Ziegler's son Jason. **Flashback:** showing how Jason presses his ear against the wall to remove the alarm wire of the painting and how his father, coming downstairs unknowingly interrupts him. He tears the picture from the wall and flees over the Veranda. **(end of flashback)** Jason confesses and the painting is found in his car. His father does not want to press charges, saying that he will get help for his son. (13:53-16:00)

**Case A Scene 6 (at the Sheltons’ house):** Sara, Grissom, and Brass look around. Grissom notes that they used to have a green blanket on the sofa, securing some fibers for the lab. Brass finds a gun that has recently been cleaned and even some bullets are missing. Shelton claims that he fired them at the shooting range. They take some of the remaining bullets for testing. Sara walks down the hallway and finds a fiber on the floor. The back door leads to a car, but Mr. Shelton explains, that he is car salesman and drives a different demo car each day. They notice the smell of bleach in the hallway and Sara explains to Shelton that bleach does not make blood disappear, it becomes only invisible to the naked eye. She sprays Luminol, which reveals remains of blood stains on the wall. Shelton claims to have no idea how it got there. Sara loses control and starts yelling at him. The man hits her hand away, Grissom intervenes and calms them down. (16:03-19:26)

**Case B Scene 4 (at the lab):** Nick banters Catherine and Warrick about ‘Mr. Sorenson’, the painting. When he is gone, Catherine tells Warrick that the Ziegler case does not ‘feel’ finished. **Character story I:** Warrick’s beeper goes off and he tells Catherine that he has to be ‘somewhere’. She remembers that he has to go to court, and Warrick just says, "Right." **(character story II):** Before he leaves, Catherine asks him what he told the guys from the Children’s Service. He says that he told them, she is a great mother and her “ex has pretty screwed up”. Catherine is relieved. (19:27-20:46)

**Case A Scene 6 (at the police department):** Brass hands over pieces of evidence to be analyzed and tells Grissom that he needs five days to prove that Scott Shelton killed his wife before he left town. Grissom says that he won’t compromise his designated end of the investigation, if Brass does not compromise his post-mortal insects analysis. (20:47-21:07)

**Case A Scene 7 (scientific analysis at the crime lab):** Back at the lab, Grissom examines the bugs and flies from Kaye’s body, using all kinds of magnifying techniques, scales and statistical data to determine their size and age. Sara scrutinizes the fibers from the apartment and the bullets from Scott Shelton’s gun under the microscope. She tells Grissom that the bullets are unusual, and she has sent them to trace. Mr. Shelton could not have done it, as he was out of town then. (21:08-22:52)

**Case A Scene 8 (at the police department):** In a meeting with Mr. Shelton, his lawyer claims that they have nothing to keep him arrested. Sara comments on the blood in the apartment, but the lawyer tells them that prior altercations could explain that. Thanking Grissom for his ‘support’, she and Mr. Shelton leave. (22:53-23:45)

**Character story I (in the hall at the lab):** Ecklie spitefully congratulates Grissom to the released wife-abuser and informs him that Warrick had one of the day shift colleagues testify in court for him, and that he has word that Warrick was gambling on *CSI* time instead of going to court. (23:46-24:54) At the common room Grissom finds Sara, who has obviously slept there. She explains that she worked until 4 a.m. trying to find proof of Scott’s guilt (character story
III). Grissom asks her to look into Warrick for him, noting that, if the rumor turns out to be the truth, Ecklie will not be able to accuse him of favoritism. (24:55-25:47)

Case B Scene 5 (elsewhere in the lab): Warrick wants to close the Sorenson case, but Catherine argues that they would have a different crime, if the Sorenson was a forgery. Applying a special light source, they test it for titanium, which should not be present in oil paint from before the 1950s and the Sorenson turns out a fake. Catherine mentions that a reputable auction house would have run the same tests, so the painting Mr. Ziegler bought was authentic, but it was forged later by Jason. They decide to check Jason’s dorm room. (25:48-26:56)

Case C Scene 2 (at the crime lab): Nick vacuums the car and finds no more hair, no signs of foul play, and notes that it is too clean. He sprays for blood and finds the test is positive. Detective Secula says that their case might now be a homicide. (26:57-27:50)

Case A Scene 9 (at Grissom’s office): Sarah drops in and Grissom asks what she found out about Warrick, but she wants to talk about something else. Character story III: She tells him that she hears Kaye’s screams at night, when she wakes up tangled in her blankets. She wants to be the victim’s voice, but although Grissom understands her empathy to the victim, he tells her not to crunch evidence to fit a theory. Still her comment makes him think the case over again. He goes back to the evidence to examine the blanket in which the body was wrapped. (27:51-29:39)

Case A Scene 10 (at a fenced area outside the lab): Later that evening Detective Brass finds him outside the lab, wrapping a pig in a sheet. The police officer asks him why it had to be a pig, and not a rabbit and Grissom explains that “they are the most like humans”. Then he tells him that Kaye might have been dead for five days, but the blanket was wrapped so tightly around her that the insects took longer than usual to get in and lay their eggs into the body, possibly even two days. He sits down and observes the process of decay, taking photos and notes of the dates and insects present. Sara joins him with some hot tea and thanks him for doing this. (29:40-31:58)

Case C Scene 3 (at the crime lab): Detective Secula tells Nick that they got a hit on one of the missing woman’s credit cards at the Four Aces Motel, which is close to the bus station. Together with some uniformed officers they break into her motel room, and find Mrs. Appleton handcuffed to the bed. But she turns out not to be a victim at all. She and her secret lover are spending a weekend together. Nick tells her that her husband reported her as missing and that they found blood in her car. The woman explains that she “took an injured dog to the vet’s”. She asks what they are going to tell her husband and Nick says that they will tell him she is okay and that it is up to her to fill in the rest of the details. (31:59-33:23)

Case A Scene 11 (at Grissom’s office): Grissom tells the District Attorney that Mrs. Shelton was dead for five days, not three. He explains the experiment, and the effect that the blanket had on the insects, but the D.A. tells him that since Detective Brass can barely understand the evidence, he doubts that a jury will, and wants them to either get some other evidence, or move on. (33:24-34:33)

Case B Scene 6 (at the Zieglers’ house): Mr. Ziegler is glad to see his painting again, but Catherine and Warrick repeat the titanium test for him and check even the other paintings. He is shocked to learn that his 10 million dollars
art collection is worthless. Warrick shows him one of the originals which the police recovered from Jason’s dorm room. Jason’s college buddies were helping him to forge the paintings. Jason claims that his friends did not know what he was doing with the copies. His father comments that he does not even know Jason and his son tells him that he is there, and he is real, and his father never even looks at him. Mr. Ziegler tells Catherine that this time, he wants to press charges. (34:34-36:50)

Case A Scene 12 (in the hallway in front of the morgue): Sara asks Grissom how he can just move on to another case, adding that everyone in the lab was laughing at them and calling them science nerds. Grissom talks to her about the beginnings of forensics and how every society learns and forgets. The body that he has been waiting for arrives, it is Kaye Shelton. They examine her again, and Grissom notices a blue mark on her temple that they had not seen before. Dr. Robbins tells them that it was covered by the blood, and the blue is embedded in her skin and would not wash off. Grissom reminds Sarah that she has sent the bullets to be further analyzed. (36:51-39:11)

Case A Scene 13 (ballistic tests at the lab): In her office she finds the envelope with the results and searches them for the missing link between the blue marks on Kaye and Scott Shelton’s bullets. They turn out to contain Teflon, and firing some of the bullets at a white target, she discovers a blue imprint around the entry hole. Testing the substance against the blue dust found on the victim, she gets a match. She shows the results to Grissom. FLASHBACK to the murder: Scott throws his wife against the wall, she cries out and tries to defend, but he presses his gun against her face and shoots her. The bullet leaves the blue imprint. He fetches the green blanket from the sofa and wraps her into it, before he drags her out of the house. (end of flashback) Grissom points out that it is still circumstantial evidence, but Sara is willing to educate the jury about bullets, and notes that it will be easier than bugs. (39:12-40:59)

Case A Scene 14 (at the police department): In presence of his lawyer and Grissom, Brass arrests Scott Shelton. Meanwhile Sara and Dr. Robbins release Kaye’s body for burial. (41:00-41:38)

Character story I (at Grissom’s office): Sara drops in and tells him that she had a talk with Warrick and that his story for missing court was lame. She gives him the surveillance tape from the Monaco, which proves that Warrick was in the casino and leaves. Grissom sits down and stares at the tape in his hands. (41:39-42:30) Fade to black, followed by TITLE SEQUENCE AND CREDITS. (42:31-43:00)


2.2.4.7 Stimuli Intensity, Violence and 'Corpse Voyeurism':

Also in terms of stimuli intensity, CSI is pushing the boundaries of what is considered acceptable on TV. Criticizing the series for its extremely violent and sexual content, the U.S. Parent Council has ranked the series among the worst prime-time programmes for family viewing. (cf. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/CSI:_Crime_Scene_Investigation; September 25, 2010) Several episodes deal with sex offenses or murders in the red-light district, staging sexual pleasure, fetishism and violence on a broad scale, ranging from SM-sex to brutal rape scenes and necrophilia, showing more skin than ever.
But not only CSI seems to stress the brutality of murder, dealing frequently with exceptionally shocking cases, already Alfred Hitchcock, the master of suspense, knew, that sex and violence are important ingredients of a blockbuster. E.g. in Blackmail (1929), but also in Marnie (1964) and Frenzy (1972) he staged intended and completed rapes and many of his murder scenes appear like rape scenes, particularly if the victim is female and strangled or killed with a knife like in Dial M for Murder (1954) or Torn Curtain (1966). (cf. http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alfred_Hitchcock; September 25, 2010) Still, Hitchcock preferred only to hint at nudeness, sexual acts and affinities, while murders in his films were violent as well.

From 1939 to 1968 U.S. film makers were restricted by the Hays Code, a set of censorship guidelines for the TV-industry, which were enforced by film boycotts of the Catholic Legion of Decency. (cf. http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hays_Code; September 25, 2010) So, for example, Hitchcock had to change the original ending of Suspicion (1941), as it was not allowed to stage the suicide of a pregnant woman. In Notorious (1946) and Saboteur (1942) he was forced to adapt several dialogues due to 'politically incorrect content', like e.g. a representative of the U.S. government saying something positive on divorce. In Notorious Hitchcock had to interrupt his original kissing scene with Ingrid Bergmann and Cary Grant by short pieces of dialogue, as movie kisses were not allowed to last for longer than 3 seconds. (cf. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alfred_Hitchcock; September 25, 2010)

But these restrictions also challenged the creativity of film directors and so in Psycho (1960), Hitchcock was the first to show a toilette in close-up, rebelling against the rigid guideline that toilets are not to be shown in film. By depicting, how an important piece of evidence (a sheet of paper with a message) is flushed down a toilette, he attached a dramatic function to it and thus circumvented and ridiculed the Hays Code. (cf. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alfred_Hitchcock; September 25, 2010) The code was later replaced by the MPAA’s (Motion Picture Association of America) rating system, a voluntary system, developed to help parents decide, if the content of a film is appropriate for their children. This gave film makers the freedom to stage whatever they wanted as long as they satisfied the audience and did not offend the public taste. (cf. http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hays_Code; September 25, 2010)

Linking the agency of the camera to the agency of the CSI specialists, Zuiker and Bruckheimer have created a new form of voyeurism, which is best described by the term 'corpse voyeurism'. The images of dead bodies seem to appeal to the viewers’ curiosity and sensationalism, which can also be observed in real life, when crowds of onlookers gather in places of accidents or crime-scenes. Also the immense amount and spread of youtube videos showing accidents and injuries that push the adrenaline level, show that there is indeed a demand for such images, particularly among young men. A naturalistic explanation would be, that despite our lifestyle and the fast development of our brain since the last ice age, the primeval hunter is still part of our psyche. Of course modern society has tamed the wild animal in us, banning violence and death from the public, but still something seems to fascinate and excite us about it.

Although some of the industrial countries were repeatedly involved in wars, the conflicts were usually settled abroad, thus only a very small part of the civil population has been exposed to aggression and violence of a certain degree, and many people have never seen a person die. The adrenaline peak which might be
caused by a particularly violent scene on TV could function like a surrogate, just as, for many people computer chat, daily soaps, and computer games like Sims have become a substitute for real communication or social interaction. Similar to ego shooters and war games, CSI allows the audience to get this 'adrenaline' kick, satisfying their sensationalism and maybe some ancient drives, observing the events on screen and knowing that it is fiction.

This 'kick' is combined with traditional elements of voyeurism. Thus not only the main characters correspond to the established beauty ideal, also the majority of the victims and dead bodies, shown in the series, are young and beautiful, which is another important ingredient of CSI. Of course youth and beauty have always been good sellers, but showing more skin than ever, contemporary series like Nip Tuck and CSI offer a form of eroticism which has never been displayed in primetime series.

Apart from a certain stimulating effect, our society tends to associate youth and beauty with innocence. Thus the sight of the perfect but frequently distorted (injured, mutilated, burned, decayed,....) bodies of the victims, heightens the tragic impulse and, at the same time, it allows to contrast the beautiful with the ugly and life with death. (see Figure 2.18 on page 83Figure 2.5 on page 57)

Also the analytic zoom onto or into the naked corpse on the slab, following the eyes and imagination of the coroner, grants the viewers glances which are usually reserved to the eyes of medical personnel. In most countries, for reasons of decency, religion and human dignity, it is not allowed to exhibit corpses, except for funerals or medical research or training. With the help of make-up and real life actors or stunningly realistic corpse dummies as well as computer generated images, Zuiker tutors the viewer in human anatomy, restaging for example in close up, how a victim’s arm was twisted by the murderer, causing a long spi-
CHAPTER 2. SPECIAL CASE ANALYSIS: COLUMBO VS. CSI

Figure 2.19: Screenshots of the murder scene in *Columbo: How to dial a murder - Rosebud* (1978)

Primary subgenres are mystery, crime, and psychological thrillers, which cover themes from the obsessed stalker, to psycho killers, to blackmail and political conspiracy, and even the return and revenge of dead people or monster. Common features of thriller and detective film are the cover-up of important information from the viewer, the investigative agency of the main character, mind games and psychological themes. (cf. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thriller_(genre); September 25, 2010).

*Columbo*, though produced from the 1970s onwards, clearly sticks to the traditional model of detective films, bypassing particularly violent scenes or images with fades to black, clever camera work and shot composition. For example in the episode *How to dial a murder - Rosebud* (1978) a vengeful psychologist murders his wife’s lover by training his two dobermans to kill any person who says 'Rosebud'. When the victim answers the phone in his house, he tricks him into uttering the fatal word and the dogs tear him to pieces.

The camera evades a direct depiction of the brutal killing by sharpening on the dangling telephone receiver, while the cruel action in the background is shown out of focus. In addition jump cuts to the murderer listening from a safe distance to the screams of the man at the other end of the line, and close-ups of their faces and eyes emotionalize and interrupt the violent sequence. An excerpt of these opening scenes can be watched on youtube. (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tbR4UcHHj3e&NR=1)

In his famous thriller *Psycho* (1960), Hitchcock stages the brutal murder...
Figure 2.20: Screenshots of Alfred Hitchcock's murder scene in *Psycho*

of Marion Crane in the shower bath of her motel room. Featuring a death struggle, which lasts over 2 minutes, he was one of the first to use fast-cutting to depict and at the same time censure violent actions. Editing short shots of the murderer, the knife in her hand and close-ups of the victim’s eyes, her mouth, her feet and her blood in the tub, with diffusing takes of the the shower head and the white tile on the wall behind her, Hitchcock creates an incredible amount of movement on screen, conveying the brutality of the murder without showing much of the victim’s injuries. The majority of shots are out of focus, or blurred by the steam, thus only the contour of the murderer’s face and the victims naked body are visible. Finally the murderer leaves the room and a series of long shots shows Marion sinking down and tearing down the shower curtain, while the water from the shower washes away her blood. So, even if Hitchcock featured brutal murders, he put main focus on the tragic of Marion’s moment of death after the murderer has left. (see Figure 2.20 on page 85)

In contrast, contemporary psycho-thrillers like “Derailed” (2005) by Lorenzo di Bonaventura, and horror-thrillers like Saw I to VII (2004-2010) by Mark Burg and Oren Koules tend to offer a shocking and sometimes painfully detailed depiction of the violent action itself. Still, or maybe just because of this fact, these films have attracted millions of viewers world wide. Thus modern crime series and particularly *CSI* borrow from this genre, combining the classic detective story with thriller’s spectacular and terrifying staging of murders. The following pictures show a selection of official DVD covers of *Saw*, which are clearly aimed to indicate the brutal content.

In addition, the narrative concept of *CSI* allows Bruckheimer to cut the
Figure 2.21: Official DVD covers of Saw I to VI
murder scenes into pieces and spread them over the whole episode. As the criminals gather more and more evidence, they gradually reconstruct the details of the crime. Thus the moment of the murder or parts of it, are staged several times in form of flashbacks, and the course of events changes according to the findings of the investigators. Using the murder scene as a recurring element and applying computer generated imagery, magnification and slow-motion techniques (see above), CSI has set new standards of visualizing violence on screen. Categorized as a crime series, it is a wolf in sheep’s clothing, gradually introducing bloody thriller and horror scenes to prime-time program, which is frequently watched by teenagers and sometimes even children.
Conclusion

Exploring the TV market and analyzing the content and aesthetic dimensions of contemporary U.S. TV shows, I identified common strategies to create regular viewing communities, increase audience numbers and keep people from zapping to other channels. Combining the assets of traditional soaps, series and serials, modern 'quality' shows are genre hybrids, offering large main casts, which allow series authors to deal with various themes and aspects of life. The serialization of the narrative gives them time to develop multiple plotstrains, which are partially interwoven. By resolving single story lines within one episode, they satisfy irregular viewers, while run on story lines are supposed to encourage and reward regular viewing, and develop the seasonal plot.

In my analysis of form and content criteria of currently aired U.S. series, I examined how these programmes reflect on contemporary themes and issues, presenting the society by which they are created. As cable revolution has resulted in an increasingly fragmented audience, modern 'quality' series are set in various context, creating new sub-genres such as medical drama, legal drama, comedy drama, science-fiction or mystery drama. Still, the plot usually centers on human desires and weaknesses, covering issues of love, hate, power, loss, envy, deceit, sex and violence. The serial format allows for complex characters and psychological depth, thus the private lives, inter-personal relationships, inner conflicts and the subjective world view of the characters play an increasingly important role.

Based on a recent ORF market and media study, I also explored the effects of TV series and the reception of their role models among Austrian viewers. Establishing an intimate relationship with their audience, modern shows feature diverse characters and explore the complex dynamics of social interaction. The viewers’ feelings towards series characters range from total or partial identification to admiration, compassion, contempt or no emotional involvement at all. Although most series like Sex in the City or Lipstick Jungle try to create strong and independent female characters, they are still stereotyped to a certain degree. Still, compared to TV shows in the 1970s and 80s, there is a general trend to individualize main characters by portraying them with little or big flaws (Monk, Carrie Bradshaw, Dr. House), which adds to their authenticity.

Considering these shows in a larger social context, the audience study supports my theory that these programmes do not autonomously create new trends, at least not in the U.S. They rather reflect on modern life, taking up and exaggerating contemporary trends, attitudes and values, which might indirectly support them. But, as U.S. shows are usually more progressive than European television, they are sometimes slightly ahead of the times, pushing the boundaries at least in Europe. In combination with their overwhelming media
CONCLUSION

presence, they introduce e.g. new life-style and fashion trends, which I demonstrated using the example of Sex and the City. The show triggered a worldwide boom of the brands featured in the series and established the image of the independent urban single woman as self-confessed fashion addict and shopaholic. Usually, contemporary European series productions, magazines and advertising companies take up these images, imitating the market leader and contributing to the cultural impact of American TV-shows.

In order to work out common features of modern 'quality' series, I analyzed over 30 U.S. shows, which are currently aired on central-European channels. Cable and multi-channel television have resulted in an increasing fragmentation of the audience, which forced programme makers to develop specialized series for certain target groups. This can be observed in the current trend to individualize programmes in terms of narrative style and content, e.g. by presenting exceptional stories (Dexter), confusing the viewers with a particularly fragmented narration (Lost), using an off-stage narrator to introduce, comment, or sum up the events (Desperate Housewives), inserting funny voice-overs and interior monologues, or staging characters' daydreams to display their feelings, contrasting their fantasy with the fictional reality (Scrubs, Ally McBeal), ...

But also the visual representation of modern U.S. series offers a variety of new styles and techniques. Examining CSI Las Vegas as the archetype of modern forensic crime series, I focused on formalist criteria, analyzing mise-en-scène, narrative structure, and editing techniques such as cross and fast cutting, which allows editors to switch between the different storylines and locations, jumping back and forth in time. Producing an enormous motion on screen, these methods are frequently supported by the specific use of color, light, and film material. Computer animated imagery makes up for what modern camera techniques can not do, and elaborate mise-en-scène, specific sounds and soundtracks comprising songs of various genres, artists and moods, add to the intensive feel of modern 'quality' TV.

Comparing CSI Las Vegas to Columbo, I described how and in what ways detective fiction has changed since the 1970s. Just as modern technology has sped up our lives, it speeds up the films we watch. Trying to illustrate the growing information density on TV, I also explored the shows episode structure, contrasting Columbo's single story arc with the multiple and time-shifted story arcs featured in CSI. The series' narrative concept is based on a cold opening, two or three cases with early and delayed peaks, and two or three character stories, which run on and link the single episodes to a season. The alternating narration of the storylines and the distribution of their peaks guarantee for a permanent stress level and flow of information, creating a tension, which ties the viewers to their seats.

All these techniques are equally employed in other serial formats, such as medical or legal drama, which raises the question, why it is still U.S. crime series like CSI, which get the best audience ratings. Combining two of the major crowd pullers, sex and violence and depicting both in unprecedented detail, they offer 'adrenaline' to the masses. Modern life lacks physical action, and man's former drives to hunt, fight and kill have become obsolete, just as in our 'single'-society many sexual fantasies will never be acted out. Fictionalized violence and sex seem to be a perfect substitute, allowing us to lean back and observe the events on screen like a voyeur, knowing that the blood is only 'ketchup'.

The increasing stimuli intensity and information density on TV are part of
CONCLUSION

a complex global socio-cultural phenomenon, which shows itself in all aspects of our fast-paced life. From laptops and pocket communicators connecting us with the worldwide web, to newspapers, magazines, radio and advertising, which surround us all day long, we are confronted with a flood of information, all processed and manipulated to gain and keep our attention. Considering the TV industry, its global competition and dependence on viewing figures, this trend is without doubt fueled by both sides, television producers as well as consumers, just as drug consumption is fueled by dealers as well as addicts. And similarly, this development is likely to end in an 'overdose', as the audience quickly adapts to the increased level, asking for more satisfaction, and profit-oriented TV producers continuously devise new strategies to intensify the viewers’ adrenaline rush.
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