

A review of master's thesis

Name of an author: Carlos Baer

Title of a thesis: Screenwriting in the era of binge-watching. An analysis of story complexity afforded by serialized content intended for rapid consumption.

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A master's thesis *titled Screenwriting in the era of binge-watching. An analysis of story complexity afforded by serialized content intended for rapid consumption.* and written by Carlos Baer **represents a complex academic paper that deserves to be admitted to a defense proces and later on even to be published in my opinion.** Firstly, it clearly organizes and points out the main topics, contextual references and its possible problems.

The author of the thesis is well aware of the amount of publications, articles and other academic or popular texts focusing on the topic of binge-watching. He even critically views and further explains those papers which he will not use and those which he is working with in more detail. The positive of such an approach is the realization that the aim of the thesis is indeed a complicated issue with several possible solutions. Therefore, he rightfully focuses his attention to a case study of narative comparison of (just) two series instead of trying to „do it all at once“ (a common methodological mistake). Needless to say, such an approach is the right one and serves the aim of the thesis well. Actually, there is nothing to be pointed out as insufficient in the analysis.

However, I would like to comment on the contextual part in further detail. Such chapters are often served just as a starting point for an author who usually knows little to nothing about the topic he or she will later analyze. This is not the case however. The chapters focusing on the historical and theoretical background of a fenomenon of binge-watching or the TV and film industry are very valuable and complex in a way the author of the thesis uses them later on. There are some points that would deserve more reserch or better to say more complexity and better critical thinking in my opinion. This is just to say that I do not consider such cases a big issue in this thesis but it might actually help the author in his next academic work (which I hope will follow one day).

Firstly, it would be efficient to write down that the author focuses mainly on American TV industry. Though it is obvious from the text itself, it is not clearly pointed out, thus there might be some confusion about several issues written in the background chapters. For example, American TV industry is very specific in comparison towards the European one. Not to mention other TV landscapes. The existence of public service television is completely different in Europe than it is in the United States e.g. It might hold importance especially in the part focusing on the differences between network TV (which actually does not exist in European TV landscapes) and cable TV. European public service TVs usually do not count with ads inside their programmes as well so the story arcs of their serialized programmes (a traditional TV as the author puts it) might theoretically be similar to American cable TV. Though they usually are not because of the media laws on the other hand. Hence, the issue complicates itself because each TV landscape has quite specific rules and conventions which are often changing not only through space but time too. The term „traditional TV“ itself is quite complicated so I would recommend to use a term linear TV to distinguish between „traditional TV“ and Netflix (as a case of non-linear TV). Also, those „TV traditions“ actually change based on social and cultural norms as well as technology development almost every ten years since 1920's and lately even every six months. The rapid changes in TV industry are actually even more significant and more rapid than in film industry. Which brings me to another point, it would be effective to distinguish between film and TV industry from the beginning of the text. Those two are actually quite different as the author pointed out several times in the text itself.

Another important point goes towards the use of Netflix data. Though the author showed an exemplary use of critical thinking he often uses Netflix data and statistics without actually considering them to be a PR material. Netflix is famous for not sharing their methodology standards and usually sharing the data only when it is highly favorable to the platform. Not to mention thanks to not sharing the methodology you can't actually verify the data itself. The author also works with binge-watching as if every viewer watched the programme the same way. (e.g. the notion about the use of a summary of previous episodes) The recipient can often also watches two to three episodes at once and than has a pause in watching. Sometimes even several days or weeks. Thus it needs to be reminded that every viewer can actually have different viewing habits and needs despite the common need and Netflix needs to consider those needs as well, that is why they still use summary reviews in some of their programmes as well.

Lastly, I would like to comment on use of melodrama and also ABC's *Lost* series (US network TV actually) which I missed when reading about serialized series which were binge-watched before Netflix's HoC. Melodrama along with a soap opera genre is often concealed when talking about contemporary prime TV. But the thing is it is one of the essential parts of so called quality TV, hence the prime TV actually. Often comments on prime TV that miss the said genre and style are actually influenced by esthetical views on TV production which is a matter of cinema theory and esthetics more than TV esthetics. So it would be actually valuable if the comments on melodrama were more critically viewed in further papers on that issued. Also, mentioning *Lost* series, the author worked with *Breaking Bad* example as one of the first series worthy of bingeing in contemporary TV... I would also argue that one of the very first series that highly supported bingeing before Netflix started using it as a PR tool were actually *Lost*. There are many reports pointing out that it was such a complex series (not to mention it was this series more than any other that pushed TV more to serialized storytelling at the time and had a heavy influence on contemporary TV not only in the United States) that quite a lot of viewers simply waited and recorded the show and then binge-watched several episodes at once. I for one experienced it with my fellow classmates as a college student as well (quite common practice between college students at the time).

After a careful consideration **I do recommend the thesis for a defense presentation** with a suggestion of **A** for appropriate grade.

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