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Insights on film and TV series analysis in sociology in times of digital media spread

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Abstract

This article aims to combine research agendas on Digital Sociology and the Sociology of cinema, explicitly considering the spread of Serial TV Shows on streaming platforms such as Netflix and HBO-Max. Since the early 2000s, with Web 2.0 allowing a shift in the traffic and consumption of multimedia –music, photos, videos, and animation– on the Internet, the presence of audiovisual content in everyday life has become more intensified than before with cinema and broadcast television. It is argued in this paper that this technological shift changes how societies and individuals relate to electronically mediated images and constitute symbolic and valuation references through social life. However, much of the cultural and imagistic references set in motion in present digital media were established by cinema and television currently in the 20th century, being seen in a naturalized way, although historically produced. This paper reviews Pierre Sorlín's sociological approach to films as ideological productions, contributing to form historical and social shared ways of conceiving reality, and Sorlin's methodological guidelines for analyzing films. However, the differences between cinema and television series are considered, according to Esquenazi's approach to TV series. Nevertheless, this paper highlights how technical and cultural specificities of today's digital media, paired with a deep individualization process, set new analytical challenges. So, it is presented an analytical reflection that places together connectivity and cinematic culture in order to comprehend how today's ideologies are partly influenced by specific recurrent imagistic constructions diffused by streaming platforms by using cinema and television languages.

Keywords
Digital sociology, mediatization, film analysis, video-streaming, individualization.

1. Introduction

This article aims to present a theoretical reflection, intended to combine research agendas on Digital Sociology and Sociology of film and cinema, considering specifically the spread of serial TV shows on streaming platforms such as Netflix and Amazon Prime Video. One understands that, since around 2005, with Web 2.0 facilitating the traffic and consumption of multimedia –music, photos, videos, and animation– on the Internet, the presence of audiovisual content in everyday life became even more intensified than before, with cinema and broadcast television. According to Boyd and Elisson (2007), Web 2.0 is characterized mostly by the development and expansion of social network sites –SNS– like Facebook, LinkedIn, among others. Simultaneously, it can be identified a technological shift that considerably reduced the traffic of multimedia content on the internet. Combined with the SNS, it allowed users to, more frequently, share multimedia content in their profiles:

> As the cost of storing photos and videos declined, SNSs also began to support large-scale media sharing; mobile applications made posting photographs and videos easy. Features that made it easier for users to post lightweight content to their profiles while simultaneously sharing it with friends enhanced profiles by making them more dynamic, but in the process made the basic profile increasingly irrelevant as a destination. Over time, the profile has shifted from a self-presentational message created by the individual to a portrait of an individual as an expression of action, a node in a series of groups, and a repository of self- and other-provided data (Boyd & Elisson, 2013, p. 154).

We believe this technological shift brings relevant changes to how societies and individuals relate to electronically mediated images and constitute symbolic and value references through social life. However, much of the cultural and imagistic references set in motion in present digital media were established by cinema and television in the 20th century, being seen almost as a natural perception, although historically produced.

Therefore, it is proposed a review of Pierre Sorlin's (1985) sociological approach to films as constitutive parts of ideology –as historical and socially shared ways of conceiving reality– as much as his methods for deep analysis of sets of films. Nonetheless, the technical and cultural specificities of today's digital societies are considered to change not only the film experience as entertainment but also its relations to viewers and how they conceive reality, communicate, and share symbolic references. In this case, as much as cinema had an influence on television in the past, mostly in technical expressiveness and resources with symbolic and narrative established conventions, reciprocally, television had influenced cinema, and, in the present, both are profoundly changed by the digitalization wave that characterizes the present moment of mediatization (Couldry & Hepp, 2020). Although it is recognized as valuable to sociology analyzing audiovisual mediatic productions in order to track unspoken ideological references in given social and historical context –which makes Sorlin's film sociology still relevant– we believe the technological moment and means to consume and signify these productions are essential to be considered in an image-based sociology of the present.

So, this essay presents an analytical reflection that places together a connectivity culture (van Djick, 2016) with a cinematic culture to understand how today's ideologies are partly influenced by specific recurrent imagistic constructions diffused by streaming platforms by using cinema and television languages. Since we focus on fictional series and how they can be related to contemporary individualization (Beck, 2002), processes that endorse reflexive and "do-it-yourself" biographies as ways of living and coping present systemic challenges. Besides all the individualized ways of consuming streaming content with different devices, those TV shows offer higher chances of watching and relating to evolving characters season by season when compared to isolated films.

This paper is structured in the following order: First, one presents a review of the contemporary digitalized society, emphasizing aspects of a connectivity culture and the concept

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of mediatization; its relations to media culture and audiovisual in general, and the notion of self-communication (Castells, 2019). The second section presents theoretical references on the individualization perspective in contemporary sociology and how it can be related to the digital mediatic culture. The third section discusses the specificity of streaming TV shows, its similarities and differences to broadcasting and cable TV shows, and the analytical contributions and limitations of Sorlin's (1985) Sociology of Cinema to a sociological approach to streaming TV shows. Then, we presented our final considerations and suggestions for analyzing these shows.

2. Mediatized and digitalized society

More often, the use of digital technologies constantly connected to the internet network takes part in everyday life. From mediated interactions between friends, family, and companions by text messages or video calls to finances and bank management, e-commerce, and remote working or seeking entertainment; geographic directions or even a date, digital platforms have become imperative for living in contemporary urban societies. Although this current phenomenon can be implied as "mediatization" in a broad sense, Hjarvard (2012) calls attention to the fact that this concept in sociology and communication can refer to older media such as the press, the radio, or the cinema. What is at stake here is understanding that societies are historically changed in their economic, cultural, and social dynamics by the spread of different mass media. However, although it might be seen as creating a brand-new culture, the new media does not mean a complete rupture with precedent communication and interaction dynamics, even though it may significantly change them.

Couldry and Hepp (2020) agree that mediatization is a broader concept, not restricted to digitalization. However, the authors point to a much more complex approach that refuses mediatization as a linear process derived from a Eurocentric generical concept of modernization. Either way, Couldry, and Hepp advocate for an approach that emphasizes that "new" and "old" media coexist in a crescent entangled and complex reality constructed and conceived through everyday life and its constant and apparently ordinary interactions. They define "mediatization" as:

> [...] a synthesis for *all* the communicative and social transformations and processes, as well as the social forms and practices built on them, derived from our increasing dependence on technologically and institutionally based mediation processes. Of course, such transformations are complex, meaning that "mediatization" is not just a kind of thing, a "logic" of doing things; in fact, it is best understood not as a "thing" or "logic" but as a variety of ways in which *possible* orderings of the social by the media are then transformed and stabilized through continuous *feedback* loops (Couldry & Hepp, 2020, p. 14, emphasis by the authors).

This obvious observation is both an argument and a reminder of the relevance of the multilateral implications of sociological studies of digital and audiovisual media nowadays. Especially since the early years of the 21st century, when, as Jenkins (2013) pointed out, new and old media converge in Web 2.0, and we shifted to platform-based navigation and connection to the Internet, highly different from before. Besides the mediatic convergence provided by the Web. 2.0, another distinct characteristic of this internet stage is the user's participation as someone who produces, shares, edits, and promotes various contents and information according to his personal needs and interests. The rising and spreading of social network platforms such as Facebook and Instagram are emblematic of this stage, as much as an example of self-produced images and identities by filling up a profile, sharing selected photos; exposing feelings and thoughts to a dispersed audience, longing for approval, signaled by "likes" and "shares." At present, we could say we are in the Web 3.0 stage, distinguished by the use of artificial intelligence for collecting and organizing all sorts of personal data from users and applying it by directing personalized advertisements and content suggestions. According to Padilha and Facioli (2018, p. 310):

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> Recovering the debate about Web 3.0, we characterize a communicational structure in which, based on information about the uses of users, the accessed content becomes directed or personalized. If Web 2.0 is celebrated as the moment in which users assume the protagonism of the scene, with the possibility of producing their own content in its current form, the main characteristic of the Web has become the register of uses under algorithmic forms. In simpler terms, the Web has come to be defined by the ability to archive, organize, and present data in a way that is personalized to the users. What we access, the spaces we frequent, the content we share –even in a private way– is information that, until then, was seen as trivial and has become data that can be computed.

It is worth noticing that the development and proliferation of digital media in everyday life since the dawn of the 21st century have gone in the direction of improving individualized ways of use and consumerism. Rather than accepting a technological determinist approach, we perceive this shift in digital media devices –both hardware and software– to be paired with a broad cultural and economic phenomenon of radicalized individualization in modern society, which can be pointed out, at least, since the 20th century '80s. So, following the example of Raymond Williams (1975), we look at digital media as a technological and cultural form.

In his classic study, Williams argues that television technology constitutes a very particular and complex interaction with other cultural activities. If, at first, television technology was mostly associated with the potentialized distribution of audiovisual contents –films, sports events, and news–, after a while, it develops its own methodical dynamics both on production and distribution. The concept of "flow" directed associated with the programming grid implies a dynamic and calculated way of combining, in sequence, distinct kinds of shows–from news to sports and entertainment. As this "flow" becomes a pattern in television, it also affects the way TV shows are conceived according to their length and the moment they are inserted in the grid, providing a sense of endless continuity between shows. Williams pointed out that the other cultural activities are not replaced by television, but their relationship becomes more complex and interdependent:

> There is a complex interaction between television technology and forms derived from other types of cultural and social activities. Many people say that television is essentially a combination and the result of the development of previous forms: newspapers, public meetings, classrooms, theaters, cinemas, sports stadiums, advertisements, and billboards. The development has become even more complex, in some cases, due to the precedents set by radio, which need to be considered. Clearly, it is not just a matter of combination and development. The adaptation of forms obtained through new technology has, in many cases, led to significant changes and some truly qualitative differences. It is worth examining each of the main forms with these questions in mind. However, when we do that, we must also look at the clearly non-derived forms that can be seen as innovative forms of television itself (Williams, 1975, p. 44).

Such perspective, theoretically, could be applied –in a limited way– to digital media studies, especially regarding their technological dimension as associated with cultural activity. Although in diverse ways, digital media technology stablishes a complex interaction with other mediatic and artistic productions that could be considered "precedent." However, the changes in digital media do not abolish precedent (mass) media and its cultural references. They rather reorganize and recombine both form and content it in a particular way that can be called mass self-communication:

> I call this historically new form of communication mass self-communication. It is mass communication because it has the potential to reach a global audience, as is the case with a video posted on YouTube, a blog with links to various sources on the Internet, or a message to a giant email list. At the same time, it is self-communication because the production of the message is self-generated, the targeting of the potential recipient is self-directed, and the retrieval of specific messages and content from the World Wide Web and communication networks is self-selected. The three forms of communication (interpersonal, mass

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> communication, and mass self-communication) coexist, interact, and complement rather than replace each other. What is historically new, with considerable consequences for social organization and cultural change, is the articulation of all forms of communication in a composite, interactive digital hypertext that includes, mixes, and recombines in its diversity the full range of cultural expressions conveyed by human interaction (Castells, 2019, p. 102).

It is impossible to measure all the impacts of an intensified and global process of individualization as a cultural phenomenon as much as, on the other hand, to measure and isolate the influence of the new dynamics and technologies based on the Internet nowadays in such a process. More likely, these events converge as part of a complex set of social and cultural changes that reciprocally transform, and direct technology is reconfigured by it. All these considered, it is vital for sociological studies on image-based media (television, cinema, advertisement, and others) and figurative art in the present to consider not only the technical shifts in accessing and consuming images but, mainly, the cultural dimension where those changes take place. Moreover, when it comes to mediatic and artistic productions historically identified with mass communication, like cinema and broadcasting, which used to be unidirectional, such changes become even more meaningful.

However, those changes do not abdicate from the precedent media. As Castells shows, the three forms of communication coexist and complement rather than replace each other. Thus, we argue that, for an interpretative sociological analysis of audiovisual productions disseminated and consumed by streaming platforms, it is mandatory to pay attention to the narrative and visual techniques and their symbolical elements established by the cinema and rearranged by television, which are constantly utilized and re-signified by contemporary viewers and users. Also, in a historically specific regard, it is essential to account for the visible and invisible ideological aspects that run through these productions. In this sense, regarding what Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002, p. xxii) wrote in the early years of the 21st century: "individualization is becoming the social structure of second modern society itself", we perceive individualization has already become the social structure of present modern society and naturalized as an ontological condition to new generations socialized in this context. The ideological aspects of a culturally individualized society express and reproduce themselves in present audiovisual productions mostly made for streaming platforms, as much as in the ways of using digital media for watching, sharing, commenting, and evaluating these productions.

3. Individualization

Individualization, as a historical and social process, is perceived here as a pillar of modern society, along with rationalization. This subject appears with different nuances in classical sociology, especially in Weber (2007) and in Simmel (2006), passing through authors such as Parsons and Elias (1994a; 1994b; 2001). However, we understand that, since the late 70s, a radicalization of this process has occurred, which goes hand in hand with a cumulative relativization of the rationalized dimension of modernity, subtracting generality and objectivity, subjugating it to individuality and personal experience as the first instances of apprehension and verification of reality.

As Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2017) have already argued, individualization, as a historical process, is not a new phenomenon in sociology. Still, according to Martuccelli (2007), the individual as a theme has appeared in diverse ways since classical sociology, even though it has not been its central object. In Durkheim (1999), when addressing socialization as a way of internalizing norms and values of society by individuals already conceived as bearers of double consciousness –individual and collective– the theme already emerges. Simmel (2006), in the atomization process of individuals in the face of urbanization. Weber (2007), in the constitution of the "Protestant ethic," gives the individual the prerogative in the search for confirmative signs –never clear– of his predestination to divine grace.

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However, in different ways, questions concerning the individual tended to be approached by perspectives focused on the social order (Martuccelli, 2007) and how the social structures or the capitalist economy itself produced, especially through the increasing social division of labor, a distinctly modern conception of the individual, directly linked to his social role. So, the individual, although not discarded from sociological analyses, tended to be seen as an epiphenomenon of economic and historical processes or social structures and institutions. As Beck and Beck-Gernsheim observe, the individualization process that has operated in the Western world since the 1960s was distinct from previous moments, sustained mainly by the proliferation of social welfare policies, expansion –or massification– of access to education, and achievements related to the labor market:

> Trends toward individualization depend on complex structural conditions, which have been realized in very few countries and, even then, only during the most recent phase of development. Among such trends are economic prosperity, the construction of a welfare state, the institutionalization of interests represented by trade unions, the legal underpinning of labor contracts, the expansion of education, the growth of the service sector and associated opportunities for mobility, and the shortening of the working week (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, p. 34).

Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002; 2017) recommend that their observations refer primarily to the European and, more specifically, German context. However, although in different ways, such individualizing trends extend to other social and geographical contexts. Nevertheless, in the wake of globalization, it is notable that, besides being propagated by the developed countries of the North, whether by intellectuals, telecommunications vehicles, or economically, with the proliferation of multinationals in different countries with profoundly diverse cultures and laws, individualization values are widely reproduced.

Countries like Brazil, even if they do not have the characteristics that would stimulate individualization in Beck's terms, absorb, to some extent, in their political and economic systems, pressures to adapt to individuality models characterized by the individual's potential as consumers. Consumers of certain signs and ideals of individuality convertible into goods and services, constituting certain "lifestyles." Styles that, paradoxically, exalt the individual in his self-production using resources produced and commercialized in a standardized way around the globe.

By analytically delimiting individualization to its cultural dimension, we are interested in understanding it in its relations of valuation and signification that, at the same time, constitute social reality and are constituted by it. We are interested in understanding how individuality is constituted as a central value in contemporary modern societies in a specific and distinct way from its modern conception predominant in the 20th century, at least until the 80s. It is, therefore, about investigating the cultural significance that individuality acquires as a value in modern Western societies, especially since the last decades of the 20th century. In this sense, we share with Max Weber the following understanding of culture: "The concept of culture is a concept of value. For us, the empirical reality is 'culture' because, while related by us to the ideas of value, it embraces the elements of reality that, through this relationship, are coated for us of significance" (Weber, 2008, p. 34).

In this radicalized individualistic cultural context, intimacy and emotions become overrated as paragons of authentic and reliable experiences of reality. In a context of generalized economic, political, and environmental uncertainty, with the accelerated decline of public and traditional institutions, individuality becomes increasingly institutionalized. Additionally, it becomes the ideological and valuational center for orientating both social and political structures and individual actions and life plans.

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4. Cinema, TV, and streaming

Considering the perspectives on contemporary social life presented above, we agree that it seeks to "understand the symbolic conditions of the constitution of the social" (Menezes, 2017, p. 26) concerning new communicative dynamics provided by recent technologies. Pierre Francastel (2005) highlighted the importance of figurative art in constituting reality and of ways of experiencing and expressing it, for its specific way of communicating with emotions, memories, and a whole cultural background historically constituted and shared, many times not codified by verbal and written language. According to the author's perspective:

> Here is simultaneously the cause and the consequence of the fact that having the real as its matter, art always adds something to it. Either it proposes to men new formulas for the organization of the material frameworks of their lives, or else it makes matter more flexible to man's desires, or it sends back to society an ideal or aggravated figure of itself. It often anticipates and creates the reality of tomorrow. Even when it produces apparently faithful images, it chooses and modifies them for its own sake (Francastel, 2005, p. 41).

In this sense, when considering the different artistic modalities and languages employed in the production of mediatized content as fundamental components of the construction of the imaginary and social life, we seek to understand their peculiar dynamics in a world increasingly mediated by digital technologies. The analysis of diverse artistic and cultural productions and techniques that gain different dynamics of consumption, appropriation, distribution, and reception made possible by digital media today raises relevant questions about the very understanding of "real."

Accordingly, digital information and communication technologies play a fundamental role by making individuals, in different moments and situations, nodal points of spreading information, opinions, and ideological discourses, as well as sources of data, increasingly employed, with various purposes, by governments and companies through artificial intelligence tools. Therefore, we understand that the social significance of radicalized individualization in the present, in what it has as specific, necessarily passes through the fields of sociology of culture, digital sociology, and social communication.

Thus, with the expansion of audiovisual productions for digital media, the sociology of cinema, as a theoretical and methodological framework, offers valuable and necessary tools for analyzing audiovisual content in the current technological context of expanded access to digital media. Hence, the aspect of media convergence is not limited to a simple generic assumption about the current context but instead serves as a basis for the use of tools and concepts proper to sociology initially oriented specifically to cinema as an object of investigation, but recognizing, within and without the cinema, a character of hybridity that manifests itself both in the production of content and in all the different forms of its consumption.

Considering these observations, there are two fundamental concepts in Pierre Sorlin's film sociology concerning his method. First the concept of relational systems, which is directly related to the authors notion of ideology:

> Social relationships are never transparent. They are even less so because they involve groups or classes with mobile contours, in a state of attenuated or declared conflict, which are already confronted directly, and must be temporized. Ideology is, therefore, a retranslation of relational systems, usable in times of crisis as well as in periods of armistice; Obviously, it is not strange to effective relationships, but it offers us a distorted and rigged vision of them (Sorlin, 1985, p. 16).

Usually, each film forms a set of hierarchic relations between characters that express the mentality of its producers and their social and historical context. Although these fictional constructions are clearly reductive, based on some exaggerated characteristics of given groups in order to provide a sense of familiarity, they allow the sociologist to perceive those aspects to be considered as distinguishing of a given group in a given historical context. For example, the

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ways in which different ethnicities are presented in USA movies in the fifties or in the nineties, the type of roles played by them, and their fate change accordingly to the historical context, expressing variable ways of conceiving these ethnic groups in American society.

In other words, the ways films place and represent distinct groups, both imagetically and narratively (beside or against which characters and situations), show, more or less directly, how these groups are perceived and imagined by the filmmakers and the viewers for whom those films were made. According to Sorlin (1985, p. 245): "By the way in which they choose, put into images an associate object, characters, relational systems, or in other words, by their construction, a film or a series of films define a way of conceiving and making social relations intelligible."

Another relevant concept by Sorlin is the "fixation points," defined as "a problem or a phenomenon that, without being directly implicated in the fiction, appears regularly on homogeneous film series and is signaled by allusions, repetitions, a particular insistence of the image, or a construction effect" (Sorlin, 1985, p. 230). Such repetitions observed in a sample of films indicate recurrent conceptions on different matters and concerns regarding the historical period in which those films were produced and released. So, by comparison of different films of a determined country in a determined period, identifying their fixation points and relational systems, the ways of conceiving social reality at that time becomes clearer. Furthermore, it´s possible to relate this to the concept of representification, by Paulo Menezes (2004), which emphasizes...

> the constructive character of the film, for it places us in the presence of relations more than in the presence of facts and things. Relations constituted by the history of the film, between what it shows and what it hides. [...] Representification would be the form of experimentation in relation to something, something that provokes a reaction and demands our taking of an evaluative position, relating to the work of our voluntary and involuntary memories that the film stimulates (Menezes, 2004, pp. 45-46).

The intersection of the two concepts suggested here goes in the sense of the "particular insistence of the image or a construction effect" of the first and the relationship with the "work of our voluntary and involuntary memories that the film stimulates" of the last. While the latter may contemplate countless references from diverse sources, including subjective emotional experiences in individual life history, it also includes memories that associate images and construction effects previously seen and recognized by viewers. To a great extent, not only from a technical point of view, but a film also capable of provoking significant reactions in its spectators hardly consists of completely innovative content disconnected from previously consolidated narrative strategies, signs, and cinematographic references.

This happens for two reasons when it comes to the audiovisual market. First, a more basic communicative order consists of the fact that the comprehension of the signs and the narrative generally needs to trigger a lexicon previously known by viewers so they can make the necessary mental associations for the apprehension of the content. The other, of a commercial nature, concerns the calculation, by studios and producers, of potential profits or losses of a certain production. Familiarity, whether with a director, a specific genre, a group of actors, or a certain theme, is a crucial element to evaluate in the film industry, whether an idea is investment-worthy or not.

The observation of market trends and possibilities of audience engagement in the audiovisual industry is decisive and, in this sense, necessary since it contributes to sustaining and reproducing anchor points. Fixation points that, in terms of multiple media running in a network, are not restricted to this or that specific media. So, we constantly see social media users commenting and sharing memes that refer to cinema, television, or videos and images produced by users that have "gone viral," regardless of their original purposes. The present films and TV shows, mostly those directed to juvenile audiences, explore such references.

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Nevertheless, a relevant obstacle emerges: How can we evaluate the sociological relevance of a set of movies or streaming shows on the Internet, considering that all sorts of content can become viral in one day and totally forgotten just a week later? It is a particularly recurrent phenomenon when it comes to streaming TV shows, especially in the final seasons. This obstacle leads us to conduct the analysis in another way. A way that isn't oriented so much by the apparent relevance of the countless and diffuse themes that supposedly "lead" the interests of digital media users. Undoubtedly, this information is worthy of attention, but there are other focal points of the analysis proposed here.

In another direction, our methodological proposal suggests naming not only the points of fixation in audiovisual productions exclusively of the present but also those points of fixation that trigger, both from the point of view of form and content, references previously established in the history of cinema and television. By form here, we designate, in a broader way, general narrative characteristics of film and television genres, as well as expressive resources of filming, editing, and articulation of images: from the use of light to the soundtrack, passing through the selection of specific framing and filters and cuts. In this sense, elements of the points of fixation in contemporary audiovisual productions are extrapolated, even by perceiving the very references of recognized productions and consecrated productions in cinema and television as important points of fixation. So, we can identify, as a point of fixation, recurrences of some situations and plots –like pos-apocalyptical plots, such as in *The Last of Us; The Walking Dead, The Last Man on Earth*, or *Sweet Tooth*– which converge in pop literature; videogames; cinema, and TV-shows.

Hence, the cinematographic language, far from being outdated by digital media, is widely [re] used to signal political positions, moods, and affections, or a mentality in general terms. The incorporation of these images into the current language of social media signals the strong presence of cinematographic iconography in contemporary social life, reaching the status of an "immediately" recognized expressive resource, even when the image –or the new meaning attributed to it– is distanced from its diegetic context. In this sense, we tend to agree with Scott McQuire (2008, p. 203):

> I have argued that modern media are not simply forms of 'representation' in the sense of providing images that either reflect or distort a social reality already established elsewhere. Rather, I have suggested that new media platforms have consistently contributed to the formation of new modes of perception and knowledge, as well as the production of new forms and sites of social action. The articulation of photography with statistical society situates the recurrent tension between the appropriation of technological media in terms of their potential for enabling instrumental mastery over space and social action and the other headings to which new media also point: towards the destabilization of traditional coordinates of space and subjectivity, and their possible reinvention along different lines.

In this topic, we focused on cinematographic media and exposed some analytical principles and concepts we use in film analysis, pointing out some challenges brought by digitalization. Nevertheless, we still need to set relevant analytical boundaries between film and TV series analysis, especially concerning TV's relation to the private space of the home and to everyday life. Here, we sustain our argument mostly in the contributions of Esquenazi's (2011) guidelines for analyzing TV series. The most significant difference between cinema and television is that the latter was designed and developed for domestic use and, in the early years, primarily directed to housewives. Esquenazi highlights the importance of television as embedded in everyday life house routines, in a place social and symbolic defined as "private," as opposed to the public sphere of formal salaried work, commerce, and services. The author also observes how TV shows fixed in TV Networks programming schedules contributed to time management inside the houses and to create a comfortable sense of continuity and stability. At a given time, TV spectators have an encounter with a group of characters with well-known and defined

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personalities and catchphrases facing different but similar situations in a known and predictable narrative structure.

Esquenazi points out that several TV series set up an almost personal and intimate relationship with viewers who, besides projecting themselves in characters and situations, accompany, day by day, their personal growth and maturation. After a while, TV series and soap opera characters become like family members. In this sense, unlike cinema, TV series allow continuous character development shared with viewers and parallel to their own self-development. Besides, the author calls attention to how TV series explore both intimacy and actualities in their narratives, creating and reinforcing a bonding relationship with viewers. Intimacy, in this sense, is understood as:

> [...] the difference between the person and the role, to use Erving Goffman's vocabulary (1991); the awareness of our participation in social life clashes with the awareness of our unity and produces the feeling of self or intimacy. The spectacle of intimacy is a privilege of fiction: reality never gives us access to the intimacy of others, nor does it re-present our own intimacy except through projection. However, fictional narratives are not held back by these limitations (Esquenazi, 2011, p. 144).

Obviously, all kinds of fictional narrative tend to explore the intimacy dimension, but, according to Esquenazi, TV series turn intimacy into the center of the narrative, combined with actuality:

> Television series, more than other fictional genres, are led to present their fictional worlds as paraphrases of reality: dependent on the television medium, they are, in fact, condemned to show an acute sensitivity to contemporary life. In order to overcome the competition and succeed, broadcasters demand that they be at the center of current affairs and that they participate in the televisionary taste for the present. So, it is not surprising that the fiction proposed by the series follows the slightest modulations in the audience's reality (Esquenazi, 2011, p. 161).

As we can see, television series, more than cinema, have constitutive features that tend to favor a close relationship to contemporary individualization processes. In fact, although some of the technical characteristics observed by Esquenazi regarding the diffusion and viewing experience necessary placed at home in a fixed schedule are no longer a limitation when it comes to streaming platforms, the consistent connection to intimacy and actuality is reinforced in congruence to a cultural context of radicalized individualism. Such a kind of contemporary individualism is culturally expressed both in the ways of using technology for consuming, commenting, and sharing information and entertainment and in the imagistic and discursive constructions of various mediatic products –video clips, films, TV series, podcasts, among others but, as we can see, such individualization when related to media is not a new phenomenon, nor does it represent a break with an imagetic culture previously established by cinema and television.

5. Final considerations and suggestions

This article aims to show, by a theoretical approach, possible intersections regarding the fields of digital media, cinema, and individualization in sociological studies, proposing a methodological reflection based on the contribution of Pierre Sorlin's sociology of cinema. By taking cinema as a fragment of ideology, which expresses beliefs, points of view, and ways of conceiving reality in determined societies and historical periods, Sorlin offers a set of methodological and technical guidelines for analyzing films and identifying the social-relational systems reconstructed and re-presented within the movies. We can summarize some of his major guidelines for analyzing films as follows: 1. Approaching films as a manifestation of ideology –a set of ideas, values, and perceptions widely shared in a given society in a given period; 2. Elaborating a sample of six to ten films, preferentially of the same country, period, or genre, choosing films that either were a box-office or a critics success (preferably both); 3. In-depth analysis of every single film as a complex "construction" of cinematic plans, cuts, lighting, sound, and all kinds of cinematic expressive technical effects; 4. Identifying the "relational systems" of each film:

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how they organize hierarchies and relations between characters, as much as the "function" of each character in the movie and their goals in the narrative, and how it expresses culturalized perceptions on real social hierarchies outside the screen.

Nevertheless, transposing Sorlin's methodology to analyze streaming TV shows reveals some limitations, mostly in two senses: First: how to set a relevant sample of productions considering the elevated volume of available productions; as much of available "specialized" internet critics and websites? Even though we could rely on sites like IMDB, Rotten Tomatoes, or the evaluation systems and metrics of the streaming platforms, there still is a great volume of productions evaluated as "excellent," seen and mentioned by a great number of viewers, which, after only a few days, became forgotten, especially when an entire season of an expected show is released at once. So, how can we be sure that a show remains sociologically relevant or representative? The second is more operational: how do we analyze and compare TV shows with up to three seasons of 8 to 13 episodes, with even 1 hour long? Should we take only one season as a sample? Or take several episodes in different seasons? The construction analysis of Pierre Sorlin fits perfectly for analyzing one or another episode but using it for analyzing all episodes of all the seasons of shows like *Grey's Anatomy* (19 seasons) or *Game of Thrones* (8 seasons) would be a lifetime work.

Although some of the challenges pointed out before are the same in analyzing TV shows at any time, it is essential to recognize what is specific and different in shows made for streaming platforms. It significantly affects their constructive dynamics. They do not need to "fit" into the TV network programmed flow, usually calculated in 1 hour or ½ hour, including commercials, so it is possible to find shows with episodes and seasons with more variable durations. Shows with less than ten episodes per season are common in streaming, as in broadcast or cable TV; a season usually has over 20 episodes.

Also, in streaming platforms, after release, the shows can be watched in any rhythm and time the viewer wants: the viewer can "binge watch" or watch each episode a day or a week, for instance. So, it radically changes the way TV shows deal with time –diegetically and extra-diegetically– with no need to fit broadcast networks timeline schedule for a year with mid-season breaks, re-runs, or end-of-season events. Also, when a show is binge-watched or abandoned before the season ends, the platforms consider such data for ordering new seasons or canceling shows. An emblematic case was the Netflix *Thirteen Reasons Why*, which was initially planned as a miniseries but lasted four seasons due to its unexpected success.

All these considered and adapting Sorlin's guidelines, for analyzing streaming platform series, we present some analytic recommendations: First, taking the first season as the one that establishes the basic "relational systems" (Sorlin, 1985, p. 202) is essential. Although it may change over several seasons, including new characters and dilemmas, the hardcore character's personalities and challenges are usually established in the first season. This brings us to the necessary endeavor of an in-depth analysis of the first season, where the fundamental and canonic elements, conflicts, and tendencies of main characters are usually established, with narrow space for significant behavior changes, recognizing that "series characters have less ability than others to transform themselves in depth since serial regularity forces them to show persistent stability" (Esquenazi, 2011, p. 149). Second, although the long last series can offer several analytical possibilities of variable themes and perspectives, it is worth analyzing at least two different shows, with more than one season each and contemporary to each other, in order to establish comparisons and identify fixation points, as indicative of culturally shared perspectives in a given time. Sorlin's recommendation of sampling 6 to 10 productions would still be desirable. However, in the case of different series, with variable seasons and episodes in a larger sample, the unit analysis tends to become less detailed and profound, losing the purpose of in-depth analysis.

Still considering the variable lengths and number of episodes, it is advised to take a sample of a few episodes in each show, considering its functions within the narrative –opening, closing,

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plot-twist– and regarding, primarily, the subject of the research. All seasons must be watched, and notes are to be taken to identify the most significant episodes according to the research subject. In this case, different shows can be analyzed, exploring thematic subcategories observed to be recurrent and significant in the show. For example, *Thirteen Reasons Why* plot was the causes and consequences of Anna Baker's suicide in a high school environment that could be considered toxic, as a place of sexual and moral abuse and violence. In all four seasons, various aspects –physical violence, sexual abuse, drug addiction, bullying– were explored many times in different episodes focused on one of those aspects. So, besides the narrative functions within the show, to compose a sample, we could select one significant category –bullying– and focus the in-depth analysis on the episodes and sequences where it takes place, observing how it is narratively constructed and presented to viewers.

Fourth, it is relevant to observe if there are any significant changes in the main character's personality and behavior, mainly those related to "personal growth" across episodes and, mostly, from season to season. Unlike movies that are not longtime franchises (like Marvel's Cinematographic Universe), critics and viewers usually expect characters to mature and "learn from their mistakes." This also potentializes the viewer's affective connection to the shows. Finally, as much as in film analysis, it is vital to pay attention to how TV series mobilize references to other mediatic productions –cinema, video clips, games, and other TV shows. These references not only constantly reiterate specific cultural shared references perceived as "natural" and self-evident –like all cinematic and televised sci-fi references insistently quoted in *Big Bang Theory* as constitutive of a "geek" way of living. These cross-references reinforce the currency of imagistic and mediatic culture as a shared part of everyday life, as well as expose the entanglement of different media through time, confirming the observations of Couldry and Hepp (2020) about the continuity of "old" media in increasing complex relation to new media.

All these considered, we believe that a sociological key to exploring different streaming shows is a context of radicalized individualization, which, at the same time, constitutes the cultural references of viewers interests and is reinforced and re-signified by these references spread by streaming platforms, among other communicative instances. As Esquenazi (2011) pointed out, more than cinema, TV series explore characters' intimacy in relation to everyday life and routines. Although films communicate intimate emotions, memories, and expectations of viewers, they are still produced as an extraordinary spectacle, placed in a special environment –the movie theater– designed to be an immersive experience presented as a part of reality. TV series, on the other hand, in broadcast television, were placed inside the private space, dividing attention to other ordinary activities –meals, domestic tasks, interactions with other residents– and inside the day-after-day routine. It is almost as if series and soap opera characters became "part of the family," sharing intimate dilemmas and, most importantly, growth experiences.

Obviously, as pointed out in this essay, the present digitalization of life deeply transforms such experience, which endorses our claim to consider, besides the construction and content of today's mediatic productions, the technological context not only as an instrumental set of new devices and possibilities but as cultural context. By way of conclusion, we have elucidated that the present context not only combines both cultural and technological aspects in the way viewers relate to TV series on streaming platforms today that reverberate relationships previously established with image-based media. Besides, in a broader way, the present tendencies of radicalized individualization play a decisive role in how viewers –especially the youngest, born in the 21st century– build their reality, their identities, values, and beliefs in a technologically mediated process. In this sense, the increasing demands of (supposed independent) self-development and self-awareness in our present individualistic culture perfectly combine with increasing personalized devices and platforms and with a kind of mediatic production focused on continually exploring subjects on intimacy and current affairs as a way of being constantly connected to viewers. Moreover, reciprocally, viewers get used to perceiving characters, icons,

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and all sorts of symbolic references of this series as part of their own reality and communicative repertoire.

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