DOI: https://doi.org/10.5007/2175-8026.2024.e98153

ADAPTATION STUDIES ON NETFLIX: APPROACHES FOR THEORIZING STREAMING PLATFORMS

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Abstract

This paper provides an introduction to Netflix and the practices of streaming services as remediation of older media, such as television and cinema. As a new medium, Netflix presents specificities in many aspects, from production to distribution and reception. This work approaches those characteristics from the perspective of Adaptation Studies, taking into consideration the negotiations between older and new media, which can both support and challenge concepts in our field of studies. It reflects on *Anne with an E* (literary adaptation), *La Casa de Papel* (format adaptation), *Fuller House* (post-literary adaptation), *Black Mirror: Bandersnatch* (meta-commentary) and *Criminal* (intramedial adaptation). In the last section, we propose three possible approaches for future works on streaming platforms: choices and processes of adaptation; adaptation as a tag genre; and new strategies of storytelling through technological features. Those are not exhaustive and should be understood as a starting point for a much-necessary conversation on theorizing streaming platforms.

Keywords: Adaptation Studies; Netflix; streaming platforms; remediation.

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Netflix: Media Heritage and Remediation

Netflix is a video streaming service platform that has grown exponentially in the last decade. At the time of this work, it has more than 232 million subscribers worldwide, according to Stoll (2023) on the Statista website, and it has held a position of major influence over the entertainment industry. Back in 2012, when the company entered the business of original content, its co-founder, Reed Hastings, marketed it as competition to HBO, hence positioning Netflix as "high-quality" television (Jenner, 2018). However, there is no denying that Netflix is not television as we used to know. It is streamed through internet, not broadcasted. It is a platform, not a network. It is self-scheduled, not programmed. It can also be streamed through devices other than television sets, such as computers, tablets and even smartphones.

Therefore, Netflix is a new medium that remediates older media, especially television, with the promise of being a convenient way to consume content, since viewers feel they have more control over their own viewing experience than they would have while watching series and films on television. As Bolter and Grusin (2000) explain: "Each new medium is justified because it fills a lack or repairs a fault in its predecessor, because it fulfils the unkept promise of an older medium. (Typically, of course, users did not realize that the older medium had failed in its promise until the new one appeared.)" (60). In this sense, Netflix seeks to provide features television failed to by proposing new formats and new ways to interact with content.

Nonetheless, as in all cases of remediation, the new medium needs to be associated with its predecessor to exist. A big part of Netflix's catalogue is composed of licensed series and films from television channels or movie theaters. Hence, Netflix is not different from traditional television, which also remediated cinema by broadcasting licensed films. However, Netflix also needs to establish itself as a medium *other* than television, as television once did itself, according to Bignell (2017) in "Adaptation and Television Historiography":

> Television invents itself by breaking away from something established as its anterior, but also its comparator or rival. Breaking away often happens by taking up and modifying a source, in other words through a process of adaptation, and the resulting text, technology or practice thus exhibits both connection to its source as well as separation from it. No identity is self-sufficient, but is performed relationally by asserting similarly to, and difference from, one or more others set up as point of comparison and contrast (162).

A similar process happens with Netflix because its identity emerged from the dynamic of similarity and difference, remediation and repudiation. With this in mind, we should take a moment to comment on other media that somehow influenced Netflix to become what it is now, through a brief panoramic view of

home-based consumption chronology of entertainment content, such as VHS, VCR, DVD and VOD.

By the 1980's, VHS (Video Home System) and VCRs (Video Cassette Recorder) were part of the domestic pastime. VHS allowed movies to be brought home some months after theater screening. Movie rentals became a cheaper option to theater tickets; the whole family and even friends could participate in the viewing experience at a fixed amount of money. Besides that, it made movies more accessible for regions without any movie theater. This was the first step towards a sense of control over consumption: people could choose when and how to watch, no longer obeying the rules of television's scheduled programmes or the social formalities of going out to a theater. What is most important when mentioning VHS, or any other new technology, is to understand how they changed people's relation to content. Tryon (2013) mentions the emerging "everyday film culture" to conceptualize streaming services and DVD kiosks, but we believe this term is also appropriate for the context of VHS because it likewise "encompasses a range of activities, values, beliefs, and perceptions about the role of entertainment in everyday life and its relationship to personal finances" (98). In other words, remediation reconfigures people's understanding of and relationship to content and entertainment, which, as consequence, will transform how the industry acts, in a loop of sorts.

We should also mention the VCR because, while VHS is a remediation of movie theaters screenings, the recording feature of the VCR was seen as a potential danger to broadcast television. Viewers were no longer stuck to a schedule to watch their favorite show; they could record it and enjoy whenever they wanted. This gave the people a sense of control over consumption similar to that of the VHS, resulting in the beginning of a supposedly more democratic access to movies and television shows. Both VHS and VCR transferred some power of choice to the audience, something Netflix would inherit and sell decades later as innovative by associating it with a feeling of technologic immediacy.

Home entertainment was proving to be a profitable branch of distribution in which movies would make money for longer periods of time. With technological evolution, the DVD (Digital Versatile Disc) was soon replacing VHS, still guided by the same business strategy for encouraging home consumption. Promising superior quality in a smaller object, companies invested heavily in selling DVDs as collectible goods, including extra content such as behind-the-scenes footage and director's commentary. For Tryon, this sold the idea of a privileged position within audiences, where viewers felt closer to the movie text: "DVDs, much more than videotapes, were marketed as collectibles, thanks in part to the added commentary tracks and making-of documentaries that helped to position movie audiences as film buffs, unofficial film students learning from Hollywood masters" (100). It is relevant to remember that this implies a format adaptation, since movies were now accompanied by official paratexts, which inevitably changed viewing experience.

DVDs stirred not only the film industry but also television. Entire seasons of shows were released in this format and could be consumed at viewer's pace (which we can now understand as the ancestor of binge-watching, the practice of watching many episodes of a show without interruptions). Fans became collectors, and DVD sets were designed for a niche that appreciated content as an art form and understood it as valuable goods. On the other hand, the rental segment continued increasing. Even though control was not so obvious as in the case of owning the DVD, renting still helped movies and shows to be more easily accessible and a part of domestic life; it allowed the family to watch a movie or series as many times as wanted for a limited period, until returning it to the store.

Netflix's first business model, in the late 1990's and beginning of the 2000's, was DVD rental by mail: a title is chosen, and it is delivered and returned through mail. From the start, Netflix's service was based on making access to content easier and more comfortable. Meanwhile, new technologies arose, and Blu-ray was to be DVD's successor; however, another distribution segment soon caught up: video-on-demand (VOD). For Steiner (2017), "If VHS and DVD were the first-generation binge-watching technology, DVRs [Digital Video Recorder] and on-demand services were the second-generation" (222). VOD quickly gained ground and became the new easiest way to consume content. Once again, the industry had to adapt. In the case of our object of analysis, Netflix decided to migrate to subscription streaming service, while maintaining its rental branch for some time. Despite the "immediate" access, content had to be repackaged, or we could say, *unpackaged*. By that we mean all extras were removed and the delivered product was stripped of official paratexts. This is not necessarily a great loss for viewers, as now this sort of information is placed on what we suggest calling "paratextual platforms". For instance, Netflix has a YouTube channel, which offers special features, like behind-the-scenes videos and interviews with cast and crew. As it provides paratexts to Netflix's subscribers, it works as a way of enticing new subscribers. One video platform works as the other's paratexts while advertising services and products. In the era of the internet, paratexts are more likely to be used as publicity, instead of a souvenir that comes with a product you purchased, as was the case with the DVD.

VOD has been implicated in the almost complete extinction of film collectors. In this context, movies and television shows are no longer understood as objects, but as non-physical texts. They are not goods, so people do not feel the need to possess them. In Tryon's words:

> This notion contributed to a significant alteration in the perceived value of a film text, given that it became increasingly difficult for studios to market DVDs or to sell upgrades to the Blu-Ray format, despite promises of a better image. By extension, movie watching became a more informal practice, one that required even less commitment than renting a title from a bricks-and-mortar store. In all cases, streaming, VOD, and EST [Electronic Sell-Through] did not simply change how movies were purchased or rented; instead, they changed the perception of the film and

> television text and altered the behaviors of consumers and the business practices of the industry itself (31).

Netflix was not the first streaming platform, but it saw the possibilities of this distribution model and invested in it while audiences had not yet fully transitioned from DVDs to VOD. The company started licensing content available for DVD rentals to streaming, initially on a small scale; yet, because it is a subscription service, it had to have enough material to request fidelity from subscribers. The catalogue grew bigger and bigger, leading to an all-you-can-watch library. Thus, it demands less commitment from viewers who can easily hop from movie to movie or even to television shows. This again changes people's understanding of film text value, since you can watch an (seemingly) infinity of content for a monthly fee.

Tyron, in his book from 2013, *On-Demand Culture: Digital Delivery and the Future of Movies*, seems somehow skeptical about the possibilities of licensing for streaming platforms, arguing that Netflix's catalogue, for example, was constituted mostly by older and not so relevant films. As we can see a decade later, a lot has changed since Netflix was able to guarantee some content fresh from theaters, in some cases, in a shorter period gap than rental stores had done. Netflix does not reveal official numbers, so it is not possible to affirm how many movies and shows are available on the platform, which also can vary depending on the country. We will discuss Netflix's catalogue further in this work, but for now it is important to understand that this mode of distribution has had a big impact on the value of film texts.

Streaming services being a part of domestic life, new technologies appeared to support and improve viewing experience. For Steiner, smart televisions, extremely expensive at first, but now commonly present in households, are the third generation of binge-watching technology:

> The perceived improvement along with increased Internet bandwidth and HDTV pushed DVD viewing out of vogue. The void was filled by what I consider to be the third generation of binge-watching technology: digital media players (DMPs) and later smart televisions. These set-top boxes connect online content to televisions, virtually eliminating the need for on-demand (223).

The irony here lies in the fact that, though streaming services remediate television, they had to be incorporated by the former, not by television networks (which are now in fact adapting themselves to the streaming segment), but, at least, by the object television itself. Computer and television sets merged into one machine that brings streaming experience closer to that of "watching tv". You can watch old television shows in your television set, maybe in the living room with the family, but now through Netflix, at your own time and without commercial breaks. Of course, this is just one of the many possibilities for watching Netflix, which can be accessed from other devices. However, the permanency of some of the older "rituals" of watching television is intriguing.

Though the Netflix library is composed of a significant number of licensed materials, there are still processes of adaptation involved, since content is repurposed to be consumed in a different manner, and the viewing experience will be other than that of broadcast television or other technologies we just presented. As mentioned, Netflix is self-scheduled, a characteristic inherited from DVDs and VOD, which means the whole catalogue is available to be consumed at any time, so the practice of binge-watching is spread. Yet, when you take pre-existing content and put it in another medium without any work of adaptation to the adopted format, it may leave the impression of awkwardness. As Baker (2017) explains, because a television series is supposed to be watched in a weekly mode, repetition and recapitulation are key to keep the viewer keen to the plot. However, if we take this same series and binge-watch it, all these repetitions will feel inconvenient and annoying. Therefore, in some cases, as we will show later in this paper, when repurposing content, Netflix needs to adapt the traditional television format to appeal to modern international audiences.

Format adaptation is also fundamental element to understand Netflix's Original content: Netflix established binge-watching as its strongest feature and introduced the block format (all episodes of a season released at the same time). When the company started developing original content back in 2013, storylines were adapted to take advantage of this format, as we will illustrate later. Netflix invests heavily in in-house content in order to make subscribers even more loyal by creating a brand narrative. Original content is a mark of exclusivity (in cases of co-productions, this may depend on the country), and the movies and shows are part of this brand narrative of innovation. People all around the world are being taught to appreciate this format and remain captivated to it.

Before advancing to our demonstration of how Adaptation Studies can approach Netflix, we need to mention that, nowadays, there are other streaming services, such as Amazon Prime Video and Apple TV, among many, which are also developing relevant content in the same format. Nevertheless, Netflix is still a benchmark in any discussion about new medium. It has been ahead of all others, constituting the model to be followed. In Baker's words: "Even as its competitors tentatively start to copy this model, the public discourse surrounding such releases is always tied back to Netflix, and as such Netflix currently maintains its public profile as the home of this new model of delivery and spectatorship" (70).

Because of all that and more, Netflix should also have some effect in our field of study, for we need to understand this recent medium and keep up with what is happening around us. As Constandinides (2010), in his work about post-celluloid adaptation, asserts: "The agenda for future research will and should be actualized when these new practices have been examined as signifying systems that do not simply remediate previous media as content, but as forms that contain new textual and contextual signification" (149). We hope the following examples may help us understand how Netflix functions as a signifying system.

What's On Netflix

Now that we have introduced Netflix as part of a medium that remediates television and other media, we would like to discuss its content. First, the difference between licensed content and Netflix's Originals needs to be made clear. One of the most important aspects to differentiate Netflix's Originals is the fact that, because they belong to the company, they should be available in all countries where Netflix operates; licensed content, on the other hand, will be available according to licensing in each country and for a limited time. This line, however, is very thin, and the two categories can meet in cases of co-produced projects. The series *Anne with an E,* for example, is part of Netflix's Originals, but it is actually a television show from the Canadian channel CBC (where it was broadcasted in a weekly format), which Netflix co-produced with license to stream internationally with its logo and in the block format. Outside Canada, then, *Anne with an E* is a Netflix's Original, while, in its home country, it is known as a television adaptation of the beloved children's book *Anne of Green Gables*, by Canadian author Lucy Maud Montgomery. Of course, we are not saying that international audiences cannot acknowledge the series as such, but the emotional connection might be different, since *Anne with an E* was initially produced for the Canadian market and, afterwards, bought by Netflix, finding its place among fans in many different countries. It is important to mention that, although it is repurposed and released in a block format, the series does not go through any other kind of format adaptation as it is the same final product broadcasted by CBC.

La Casa de Papel is another example of a series which was previously broadcasted by television, but, unlike *Anne with an E*, was not at first co-produced by Netflix, so it had to go through the process of format adaptation to become a Netflix's Original. The Spanish version was a limited series from Antena 3 network, and it consisted of 15 episodes, each over one hour long. When Netflix bought the rights of international streaming, the material was recut to be more similar to the American format of 45 minutes per episode. 15 episodes, then, became 22, and were released in two blocks, called Part 1 (13 episodes) and Part 2 (9 episodes). Repurposing of *La Casa de Papel* included format adaptation to appeal to a more international audience and to be part of Netflix's Originals family. In this sense, the series is indeed closer to what we would expect of a Netflix's Original than *Anne with an E*, because, even though it is a previously broadcasted television show, Netflix was more involved in adapting the material to the medium, and it resulted in a final product exclusive to the platform. Netflix's effort seems to have the desired effect, since *La Casa de Papel* was a huge success and became the most-watched non-English-language series of that time. Furthermore, because of the consistent success worldwide, Netflix ordered new episodes directly from the production company and invested a bigger budget, permitting the plot to be more ambitious. Now an in-house production, Parts 3, 4 and 5 are unplanned sequels to the first two, so, although *La Casa de Papel* was not an adaptation *per*

se, these parts are adaptations "of an earlier character, setting, or concept" (Leitch 2007, 120), following Netflix's standards and brand narrative.

Another interesting phenomenon that needs to be addressed through the perspective of Adaptation Studies is Netflix's "rescuing" of cancelled television shows. One of the first Netflix's Originals was, in fact, a revival of Fox's *Arrested Development*, which, after three seasons, was cancelled by the network back in 2006 due to poor ratings, and creator Mitchell Hurwitz's facing creative limitations in relation to the weekly format. However, the series had a loyal fan base who was not shy to express discontent. In 2012, Netflix announced the return of the series with the same cast and Hurwitz in creative command, a strategic move, as Bianchini and Souza (2017) explain: "The decision to bring back showrunner Hurwitz and his creative fellows for a fourth season of *Arrested Development* illustrates Netflix's expertise in combining the series' captive fan base with the creative team's interest in remixing the American sitcom form" (154). Season 4, then, marked both the series, now free of the weekly format, and Netflix, that showed its intent to experiment with original content, building its brand narrative. The fans were exhilarated by the revival but, when season 4 was released, some had to get familiar with the possibilities Netflix presented and Hurwitz adopted:

> The structure of the season's comic effect, through temporal alternations and narrative fragmentation, was designed by exploring the possibility of continuous viewership of the 15 episodes – utilizing the binge-watching behavior associated with Netflix's distribution model. Such a decision ultimately resulted in a radicalized puzzle-like design of the narrative. (Bianchini and Souza 2017, 153)

Bianchini and Souza also point out that many fans were disappointed after watching the first two episodes of the revival season because of the fragmented narrative. Only by the end of the season they could understand that Hurwitz was proposing a new scheme of storytelling while still maintaining *Arrested Development*'s specific traits, like the comic docudrama style with the handheld camera. Viewers learned that, although season 4 was a sequel to the previous seasons, the format was adapted into a block, and it required the binge-watching attitude. Format adaptation, in this case, is different from what happened with *La Casa de Papel*, which was an editing reworking. Here, format was adapted in pre-production – the plot and the storytelling were developed to take advantage of what the medium could offer, and broadcast television could not. However, Netflix's strategy of "rescuing" is not about bringing back wrongly cancelled series, but evidencing its position of innovative, at the same time as it shows some kind of appreciation for the sense of familiarity, which resembles Hutcheon's remark on adaptations: "the appeal of adaptations for audiences lies in their mixture of repetition and difference, of familiarity and novelty" (2006, 114).

There is another occurrence of a Netflix Original that calls for our attention concerning adaptation's appeal to the audience: *Fuller House* (2016 - 2020). The

series is a separate instalment from ABC's *Full House* (1987-1995) while, at the same time, it is its sequel and its adaptation. A separate instalment because, even though the relation to *Full House* is explicit, Netflix does not simply revive it as *Full House*'s season 9, as happened to *Arrested Development*. It can also be seen as a sequel, since it involves most of the same characters, and the chronology of the original storyline is respected. What happened in *Full House*'s episodes is an important intertext to its more than twenty-year-later successor; keeping the connections is a crucial strategy to the franchise concept. *Fuller House* depends on the original and resorts to the same familiar jokes and punchlines to appeal to the nostalgic fans who are tired of reruns and want new, yet familiar, material. Furthermore, the sequel can induce an opposite movement, making some viewers want to re-watch *Full House* – which is on Netflix's catalogue in some countries. A win-win situation to Netflix, as Parody (2011) notes in her essay "Franchise/Adaptation":

> Engaging with a franchise adaptation can rekindle interest in other franchise instalments, prompt a revisit or even new purchase of other licensed products, remind consumers of the part that the entertainment brand has played in their cultural and social life, and reaffirm or reignite their attachment and affective response to it. The fact that adaptation induces and trades on memory and nostalgia thus becomes a particularly significant critical issue in the study of franchised adaptation and the strategies by which particular adaptations do so, a particularly crucial site for analysis. (215)

Besides being a franchise adaptation because of the sequel characteristics, *Fuller House* is even more alarmingly an adaptation if we think of the plot, which is a re-do of the previous instalment. DJ (Candace Cameron), now an adult, is recently widowed and has to raise three boys on her own. She is soon helped by sister Stephanie (Jodie Sweetin) and best friend Kimmy (Andrea Barber), who decide to live together at the Tanner's house. Same plot, only gender is inversed: originally three men trying to raise three little girls; now the opposite happens. Once again, the mixture of repetition and difference is used in a work of adaptation that clearly seeks to lure television fans to the new medium.

We also would like to mention the new interactive functionality Netflix is investing in. The first efforts towards interactive content, directed towards kids, were released in 2017, and the slogan associated was "Don't just watch. Decide." This means that, at a certain point of the storytelling, the viewer would be presented with two alternatives, and the narrative would continue depending on the choice made. It is easy to see why Netflix tried it first with a juvenile audience, since kids would not be so demanding concerning the quality of this branch narrative.

In 2018, Netflix released the first interactive content for adults, *Black Mirror: Bandersnatch*. *Black Mirror* is an anthology series created by Charlie Brooke for the British network Channel 4. The streaming service company bought the series in 2015 and ordered new episodes for more seasons. Because it is an anthology

series, expectation over new episodes is always high, some are higher rated than others, but all plots revolve around technology's controversies. Many of these stories are set in an undetermined retro-futuristic time so there is a paradoxical co-existence between utopia and dystopia. *Black Mirror: Bandersnatch* is the first and only film associated with the series, working as a kind of longer episode – even though duration differs depending on the choices made – following the same aesthetics and themes. There are many things to talk about anthology series, a growing genre, in relation to Adaptation Studies, but for now we would like to concentrate on the (meta)commentary comprehended in the interactive storyline.

Leitch (2007) defines the category of (meta)commentary adaptations: "The most characteristic films of this sort are not so much adaptations as films about adaptation, films whose subject is the problems involved in producing texts" (111). The plot of *Black Mirror: Bandersnatch* is based on this premise: Stefan Butler (Fionn Whitehead) is a programmer trying to adapt a book into a video game. The problem is that, because the book follows a branch narrative with multiple possible paths, he faces many difficulties. From this point on, each decision the viewer makes will influence Stefan's actions, sometimes concerning the process of adaptation, leading to different events. If this was not (meta) commentary enough, depending on the path the viewer chooses, the film can be self-referential about its interactive functionality. In one of the possible branches, Stefan realizes his actions are being controlled by someone else, and the viewer can decide to interact "directly" with him through his computer in the name of Netflix. Since the plot is set in 1984, Netflix has not been founded yet and Stefan has no idea of what it is. Hence, the film identifies Netflix's own role in "futuristic" technology's controversies.

The interactive functionality is also being questioned on many levels; one example is the in-between place it leaves *Black Mirror: Bandersnatch*: it is neither a traditional film nor a video game. The viewer has some power of choice, though only over predetermined paths, which is a similar condition to that of video games; however, we are not in the role of one of the characters, we maintain the position of a viewer with God complex. There is a sort of voyeurism over what will happen next based on our decision making. Therefore, *Black Mirror: Bandersnatch* has a divergent approach from Bolter and Grusin's definition of the interactive film because, although the viewer has the power of control over the narrative, there is no immersive feeling of "falling into a movie." On the contrary, Stefan is aware there is someone *else* controlling him, hence, the viewer does not take Stefan's role because that the viewer has an important role in this plot.

According to the creators, there are five official endings, and not even the writers are sure of how many paths are possible, leading to a unique experience each time. Yet, the five endings are a hint of five main storylines and, although they all start from the (meta)commentary plot, not all of them will be self-referential. One storyline, for example, will focus on Stefan's traumas over his mother's death. Hence, *Black Mirror: Bandersnatch* is a great object for studying (meta)commentary and self-referential adaptations, but it is also relevant to

think about the structure of the branch narrative itself. Finally, *Black Mirror: Bandersnatch* won an Emmy (2019) for Outstanding Television Movie and, in the Press Room, Brooker commented on the future of interactive films: "I think there will be a lot more interactive, but it is never going to replace, like, sitting back and being told a story. I think it's just a different genre and it will coexist like musicals or westerns (…)".

New features and narrative structures, such as the examples selected for this work, are strategies used by Netflix to highlight the discrepancies between older and new media. Notwithstanding, streaming platforms will coexist with traditional television because, as Bolter and Grusin argue in their definition of medium:

> We offer this simple definition: a medium is that which remediates. It is that which appropriates the techniques, forms, and social significance of other media and attempts to rival or refashion them in the name of the real. A medium in our culture can never operate in isolation, because it must enter into relationships of respect and rivalry with other media. (56)

We should also keep in mind that, although streaming service is remediating television and other media, it has its own faults and contradictions, some of which most likely will only be noticeable after a newer medium remediates it. However, as we hope to have made clear by now, we first need to learn about Netflix's specifics, and about what makes it different from television in order to better understand the kind of content being produced for the platform, and how it can impact the field of Adaptation Studies.

Adaptation Studies and Netflix: Possible Approaches

Netflix and other streaming services are already being contemplated by Media Studies, and Film Studies. Adaptation Studies too have much to contribute to understanding and studying the medium with a unique perspective: that of choices. As Hutcheon explains:

> In the act of adapting, choices are made based on many factors, as we have seen, including genre or medium conventions, political engagement, and personal as well as public history. These decisions are made in a creative as well as an interpretive context that is ideological, social, historical, cultural, personal and aesthetic. (108)

Netflix, as a distribution company, and now a production company, makes decisions related to adaptation which are relevant to this field. First of all, does this new medium favor works of adaptation? Does it give more options on how to adapt? Again, Netflix does not reveal detailed information about its numbers, so it becomes extremely difficult to perform a quantitative analysis taking into consideration the fact that licensed content availability is inconstant and almost impossible to track. For this reason, it is more plausible to concentrate on the

Originals. According to Tryon, *House of Cards* (2013-2018), the first Original, is an adaptation of the homonymous British miniseries from BBC, which settled the idea for next productions like the already mentioned *Arrested Development*:

> The British miniseries had been popular with regular Netflix users, making an American adaptation an attractive opportunity for the company in its efforts to provide original content unavailable on other services. Later, Netflix deepened its investments in original content by reviving the critically acclaimed cult television series *Arrested Development* five years after the Fox Network canceled it. (33)

The ironically named "Originals", and consequently, Netflix's brand narrative, were born using adaptations to attract the attention of traditional audiences and, at the same time, to create another viewing experience in concordance to the new medium. We suggest this as the first possible approach for studying Netflix from the perspective of Adaptation Studies: since some dynamics differ, we can benefit from including streaming platforms in the field's scope to also help us develop and even rethink concepts. It can bring new perspectives to old issues, similarly to what occurs in remediation processes: new medium's adaptations can highlight older media's specificities and strategies in adapting. As Constandinides points out, "The future of adaptation studies would be to embrace the theoretical mapping of new media within as there is a need for a shift toward new ways of approaching adaptations" (149). For example, the binge-watch mode has an impact in how a book is adapted to series, becoming more similar to a longer film divided in parts. On the other hand, the episodic dimension from book chapters is highlighted in broadcast television shows through cliffhangers. This is more obvious in contrast to streaming platforms' productions, which can be analyzed from the perspective of choices in adaptation processes. Cardwell (2007) explains about traditional television:

> The best television adaptations continue to use one of television's major strengths: its serial form – and exploit this in combinations with a strong emphasis on writing high-quality dialogue, and the medium's greater capacity for intimate equality with the viewer. (193-4)

In the case of streaming, serial form, as defined by Cardwell, is repudiated. The viewer can simply skip the "previously on" part of the episode and even the opening credits, especially if watching the episodes in sequence, so the experience does not seem redundant or repetitive. Do Netflix's series adaptations resemble more cinema than television then? Cinema has often been regarded as a more serious art form than television, making it no mystery why Netflix chooses to be more connected to films. Still, although it could simply favor adapting books into movies than into series, it does not necessarily do so. One reasonable explanation is that feature-length films also show limitations regarding its standard-time run of 90 to 120 minutes. In this aspect, series provide more time for adapting stories

comfortably, including all the events to prevent fans to feel like "the book was better", which happens frequently when a movie adaptation cuts out some scene from the plot. This, again, holds similarity to traditional television:

> In this way, television adaptations are able not only to retain more of the source's narrative, but also to open out the details of the novel – its intricacies of plot, mood, and atmosphere, to build characters and our relationships with them more incrementally and carefully, and to sustain a sense of contemplation. (Cardwell, 2007, 187)

Netflix, then, finds a middle ground between the two older media: it adapts books into series that, when binge-watched, provide a similar experience to movie viewing, however, providing enough time to develop the plot in episodes, while maintaining the supposedly artistic characteristic of cinema. There is an international standard established by Netflix concerning the number of episodes per season (7 to 10 episodes) but, in this new medium, length is more flexible than in broadcast or even cable television, since there is no airtime scheduling. Netflix's limited series are a good example of how streaming platforms production can remediate both cinema and television when adapting a text, taking advantage of their best features and repudiating the rest.

We have already provided categories for how the Originals use different kinds of adaptation when analyzing *Anne with an E* (literary adaptation), *La Casa de Papel* (format adaptation for repurposing), *Fuller House* (post-literary adaptation, broadcast television show to streaming platform show) and *Black Mirror: Bandersnatch* (meta-commentary). Many questions can be raised from each example based on the perspectives of Adaptation Studies. For now, we can start trying to understand the choices in the processes of adaptations in this new medium. Just as discussed above, does the production choose to resemble more television or cinema? Or neither? What characteristics remain from these older media in the final product adapted specifically to the environment of streaming platform? Which are repudiated?

No doubt, in some cases, Adaptation Studies will not be able to contemplate these new dynamics with former concepts, but it is a good opportunity to face new challenges. We would like to bring another example of a new adaptation strategy used by Netflix to promote itself as innovative. Intramedial adaptation is not something new; however, with the streaming platform investing in becoming an international environment where the subscriber can find content from many different countries and cultures, Netflix has recently been investing in intramedial adaptations to support this position. Let us use the multi-national series *Criminal* (2019 -) as an example. We use here the term "multi-national series" because that is how its creators call it, and there is no term from adaptations studies to contemplate it, since there is not yet a theorizing over it. *Criminal* is composed of four instalments: *Criminal: UK*; *Criminal: Germany*; *Criminal: Spain*; *Criminal: France*. Each follows the same premise (solving crimes through questioning in the same interrogation room), but not necessarily identical plots (different

characters and dilemmas). The four series were released at the same time, but there is no linear sequence to watch them. It does not matter which you start with because, even though they share the premise, they can also function as separated series. According to one of the creators, Jim Field Smith, in his official website, "These episodes are being made in local language, written and directed by talent from their respective countries. This revolutionary multi-national original drama series shoots on a purpose-built set at the Ciudad de la Tele studios in Madrid". Therefore, each series adapted the premise from its cultural perspective, being an intramedial adaptation of the other. Therefore, they challenge our preconcept of an adaptation as one work deriving from another. Instinctively, we think there must be a source text so there can be an adaptation. However, *Criminal* suggests that, instead of a source text, one idea matrix is adapted, and all else, such as plot and characters, is created and not recreated, as is usually the case in adaptations. Of course, we know that a similar dynamic happens in relation to genres; for instance, all medical drama shows in which the doctor acts like a detective seem to resemble each other, in higher or lesser degree, yet they are not kindred by the exact same premise and scenario. In the case of *Criminal,* although it is surely indirectly adapting previous investigation shows, it does not rely on the idea of chronological development of adaptations to produce its four instalments. This makes us think that adaptations are not only linear constructions (even if they can branch in different lines), but they could also be parallel works. According to Lobato (2019): "[…] Netflix, as a multinational SVOD service that spans national borders and operates in a large number of countries simultaneously, represents a particular configuration of global television that requires study and theorization" (23). As an experimental drama, it takes advantage of what this new medium offers: international production and audience, no strict limits regarding length or format, and the possibility of being released all at once in Netflix's trend mark of the block format. With these specificities, Netflix challenges the boundaries we theorize over in Adaptation Studies, so we need to be able to ponder and integrate new modes of adaptation intrinsic to streaming platforms.

The second possible approach we would like to suggest here is the idea of adaptation as genre. Leitch states that "Even if it has been an invisible genre, there is abundant precedent for adaptation as a category widely recognized by filmgoers in both high theory and low theory" (106). If we think of Netflix's catalogue and its interface, it can remind us of brick-and-mortar video renting stores, where DVDs were displayed in certain genres, like Drama, Comedy etc. What is most interesting of this analogy, nonetheless, is that Netflix uses tags to organize its catalogue just like video stores used to, but now they intend to create a sense of infinity. There are many tag categories in Netflix, which also cross and overlap, and, consequently, the subscriber is tricked into a feeling of content multiplication, through algorithms sorting and selecting suggestions made for a specific user.

Smith-Rowsey (2016) explains that Netflix's library is organized in 19 main categories that are branched into more than 400 subcategories and 73,000 micro-genres (106)[1]. Consequently, Netflix raises questions, not only to genre studies

in general, but also to Adaptation Studies. There are around 100 micro-genres involving adaptations in the platform, even though Netflix does not use the term "adaptation" but "based on". According to Smith-Rowsey's explanation on how the library is organized, we can understand that "based on" is a subcategory that branches out into micro-genres. To illustrate, let us observe four micro-genres: "20th Century Period Pieces based on bestsellers"; "20th Century Period Pieces based on Books"; "20th Century Period Pieces based on classic literature"; "20th Century Period Pieces based on real life". Hence, "Based on" is what connects those 100 micro-genres.

When looking at the content of each of those micro-genres, we find an enormous range of movies. For example, in "20th Century Period Pieces based on real life" we can find films from *Schindler's List* (1993) to *The Conjuring 2* (2016). Spielberg's film appears again in another "based on" micro-genre, "20th Century Period Pieces based on Books". As Leitch argues, "Adaptations can no doubt be set alongside one another and certain common elements extracted from the group" (107). Being an adaptation is one of the characteristics these movies have in common. Netflix's breaking down of categories into subcategories, which are themselves broken down into micro-categories, shows adaptation is considered a genre, a characteristic of storytelling, but one that should be branched out in its specificities. If we accept Netflix's proposed terminology, the type of source text characterizes the micro-genre of adaptation.

With this, we can also think about audiences who watch adaptations *as adaptations*, as Hutcheon states (139). Because the same movie can be accessed from diverse categories and they overlap, viewers will have different experiences. Tryon affirms that "[…] we must remain attentive not only to the various distribution channels where movies and television shows circulate but also to the practices of consumers as they attempt to navigate them" (180). Viewers who watch a film from a "based on" tag will probably have a distinctive participation, since they are informed of this characteristic before pressing play. They choose this experience. The same movie could be accessed from another tag that would not evoke adaptation. In Leitch's words:

> In the end, the decision about how to experience an adaptation as an adaptation is up to individual members of the audience. But their decision will be everywhere inflected by the power of the institutional contexts within which a given adaptation, and adaptations in general, are made available to them and identified as such. (117)

So, Netflix's strategy of organizing its library could be analyzed and used to help us think about adaptation as a genre and how subscribers are impacted by those tags. We can also wonder about the post-literary adaptation references in those categories, such as "Based on a Video Game" and "Based on TV shows". Smith-Rowsey concludes: "Netflix's list of 400 subgenre terms represents a potential path for achievable scholarship that offers the promise of slightly less privileging of the same old texts" (121). Just like the Oscar's nomenclature of

its categories helped us reflect about adaptations as a genre, new technologies' systematizing could contribute to our studies.

One last possible approach we would like to indicate is Netflix's own remediation concerning technology. Because its business model is built on the idea of innovation, the company needs to be constantly showing evolution. We have presented here the example of *Black Mirror: Bandersnatch*, the interactive movie. New technological features can and do affect storytelling. For Constandinides, quoting Harries:

> This logic forces the viewer to transform into an avid consumer of media products as he becomes according to Dan Harries a 'viewser' combining both viewing and using media: 'Screens are becoming *loci* of an assortment of media activities and experiences, [. . .]. These are the screens of an expanding media environment where the modes of viewing and using commingle in ways only previously proposed in the narratives of science fiction'. (38)

As of now, Netflix's interactive content are adaptations, taking advantage of the familiarity of old stories and characters to introduce the new technological feature. It is important to reflect further about the relations between technology and adaptation, especially nowadays, when the velocity of technological innovations is at full speed.

In this section, we provided some possible approaches Adaptation Studies could use to theorize the practices that have become ordinary in people's lives. After the many points raised in this paper, we would like to quote Cardwell's conclusion from her essay "Literature on the small screen":

> It would be fruitful to move towards a greater understanding of and responsiveness to the particularities of the television medium, accepting its limitations and recognizing its special capacities, and to evaluate adaptations from within such a comprehension. It is also vital to recognize television's different historical purposes and principles. Television adaptations are not a branch of film adaptations but are a distinct medium-specific form (194).

Likewise, streaming platforms present the same questions television did while introducing new ones. Here, we made an effort to cover both, since we are dealing with remediation, which implies negotiations between appropriations and repudiations by the new medium. Contemplating processes of remediation is a healthy necessity to our field of research, since it confronts our own traditional practices in order to understand contemporary phenomena. We expect this work can serve as an introduction to an expanding discussion, not only about Netflix, but other platforms as well, so we can have a better view of how we should perceive this topic in Adaptation Studies.

Note

1. For a table with the 19 main categories, please see Smith-Rowsey's essay 'Imaginative Indices and Deceptive Domains: How Netflix's Categories and Genres Redefine the Long Tail' (123).

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Submission date: 12/01/2024
Acceptance date: 19/08/2024