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City Iconicity in Twenty-First-Century American Crime Drama: Las Vegas and Baltimore's
Televisual Representation Seen from the Multimodal Perspective of Television History, Creation
and Production, Audiences, and Visual Style

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Resumo

A presente dissertação de mestrado explora a intersecção onde a iconicidade, a cidade e os estudos de média e comunicação, com foco principal na televisão, se encontram. Expandindo a minha curiosidade sobre a representação da cidade nos meios visuais e aproveitando o considerável impacto exercido pela televisão na representação da realidade, tento expor as formas em que essa influência transparece não apenas no conteúdo, mas também nas práticas da indústria e na recepção. Devido ao incontável número de programas de televisão no geral e ao seu número ainda vasto quando se contam apenas os dos EUA, limito a minha pesquisa aos dramas policiais e criminais norte-americanos que formaram minha imaginação e compreensão de como cidades como Nova York, Chicago, Baltimore ou Las Vegas são e funcionam. Contudo, a representação visual final dos espaços da cidade não é o único elemento das produções televisivas que afeta a compreensão dos espetadores em relação à cidade. Além disso, algumas imagens visuais parecem intuitivamente mais poderosas do que outras: aquelas que poderiam ser classificadas como icónicas.

Portanto, o foco deste projeto centra-se em apresentar a noção de iconicidade, as suas complexidades e desafios quanto à sua definição (Capítulo 1), e combiná-la com a iconicidade da cidade na televisão, bem como com a indústria e produção televisiva para divulgar como as escolhas e práticas da indústria televisiva e em torno dela formam a imagem da cidade empregando a iconicidade (Capítulo 2). O termo “iconicidade” foi usado pela primeira vez na Grécia e, através da mescla de culturas e línguas ao longo dos séculos, foi apropriado para novos usos e áreas de estudo mais especializados, desde artes e estética (que também são examinadas no contexto da televisão) até à linguística e aos estudos de identidade e celebridade. Como o conceito se refere a diversas áreas e especialidades, é muito difícil encontrar uma definição final do que é “iconicidade.” Consequentemente, introduzo o conceito de iconicidade em alguns campos de estudos relacionados com a minha dissertação: linguística visual, design, marketing e branding, arquitetura, metonímia e, finalmente, televisão e cinema. Concluído o primeiro capítulo, proponho a minha definição de iconicidade para o único propósito deste projeto. No segundo capítulo, desenvolvo a teoria sobre a televisão e as suas ligações com a iconicidade.

A análise da televisão é apoiada por dois trabalhos do campo dos estudos de comunicação: o primeiro é um artigo onde Timothy Havens, Amanda D. Lotz e Serra Tinic propõem o seu conceito de pesquisa crítica da indústria de média; a segunda, baseada no livro

Television Studies de Jonathan Gray e Amanda D. Lotz, a abordagem multimodal dos estudos de televisão, que requer uma análise de quatro áreas que giram em torno do meio: programas, audiências, indústria e contexto. Contudo, reorganizo a sua ordem para seguir o processo de produção televisiva. Nomeadamente, a minha abordagem é, primeiro, apresentar um breve contexto histórico da televisão e dos seus contextos culturais, sociais e tecnológicos, explicar como estes influenciaram as fases de criação e produção, que por sua vez moldaram os programas televisivos finais, recebidos e compreendidos de várias maneiras por grupos de espectadores. Durante muitas décadas, a televisão como meio de comunicação foi comparada ao cinema e tratada como seu derivado popular, não digna de investigação académica, de opiniões críticas ou de estima. Os avanços tecnológicos ajudaram a melhorar a qualidade e o acesso ao conteúdo televisivo – tanto para visualização das estreias como para subseqüentes sessões e análises assíncronas, *etc.* – enquanto as mudanças económicas e sociais exerceram maior pressão no sentido de investigar a indústria, as audiências e a influência do meio de comunicação na vida quotidiana e nos estilos de vida. As questões orçamentais também tiveram impacto na forma como os programas de televisão são produzidos e distribuídos. Todos estes elementos, juntamente com decisões criativas originais e pessoais, influenciam a escolha dos locais de ambientação, bem como a frequência e o estilo visual da sua representação.

Os próprios programas de televisão são compostos por uma miríade de elementos que podem ser dissecados, por exemplo, roteiros e suas qualidades de escrita, arcos de personagens, enredos, captura de ecrã, tipos de câmaras, *mise-en-scène*, fotografia, música, *etc.* No contexto da iconicidade da cidade, abordo os programas analisando a sua representação visual dos espaços da cidade em tipos de enquadramentos e a sua colocação nos episódios. Associo isso aos tipos de programação e distribuição seguidos por determinadas empresas de televisão, a fim de expor como a indústria nos bastidores influencia a iconicidade da cidade na produção final.

Nem a iconicidade nem a televisão existiriam sem os espectadores ou, no geral, os públicos que não só recebem um determinado conteúdo, mas participam ativamente na descodificação dos textos e dos seus significados, fornecem os seus julgamentos positivos ou negativos, e posteriormente discutem, partilham novamente e reafirmam o estatuto icónico de pessoas, itens e fenómenos de inúmeras maneiras. Nas sociedades altamente tecnológicas de hoje, sujeitas a um fluxo contínuo de informação partilhada através de múltiplos canais, a partilha repetida de imagens ou citações não é suficiente para estabelecer ou manter a

iconicidade. Segundo este argumento, é parcialmente graças a significados e valores específicos que a iconicidade é preservada. Para concretizar a teoria sobre a iconicidade e a televisão em ligação à representação de cidades norte-americanas, uso dois exemplos de dramas policiais televisivos produzidos nos Estados Unidos: *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* (*CSI: Crime Sob Investigação*), criado por Anthony E. Zuiker, e *The Wire*, escrito por David Simon (Capítulo 3).

Apesar de estas séries retratarem um mundo de crime e da investigação policial em Las Vegas, Nevada, e em Baltimore, Maryland, elas diferem em múltiplas esferas como as ideias e motivações dos criadores, tipo de produção, distribuição e programação ou popularidade. Distribuído por uma rede de transmissão comercial, *CSI* tornou-se um fenômeno mundial e introduziu uma nova abordagem ao trabalho dos investigadores policiais na televisão. Simultaneamente, *The Wire* também apresentou uma nova estrutura e estilo de escrita de programas de televisão, mas recebeu bons elogios da crítica somente após várias temporadas no canal *premium* pago. Os seus contrastes, quais quer que seja, não pretendem comparar qualitativamente qual dessas séries, se alguma, é melhor em algum aspecto. Pelo contrário, ao escolher exemplos muito diferentes, procuro expor quais os elementos da produção da série televisiva que têm o seu impacto específico na iconicidade da cidade. Portanto, dividido em duas partes, o último capítulo apresenta primeiro a popular série processual transmitida pela CBS (nos EUA) e, depois, concentra-se na série aclamada pela crítica da HBO. As análises seguem a mesma ordem do capítulo teórico – contexto, indústria, público e estilo visual – e incluem vários exemplos de enquadramentos quando este último é considerado.

A dissertação conclui ao destacar as principais dependências entre as escolhas criativas, as decisões de produção, as leituras do público, a representação visual e a sua probabilidade de dar origem e/ou sustentar o estatuto icónico das cidades americanas aí representadas. *CSI* e *The Wire* são estudos de caso úteis para observar como os contextos industrial, social e cultural podem impactar cidades aparentemente secundárias, que à primeira vista podem parecer meros cenários para os eventos principais. Como o escopo desta pesquisa está sujeito a limites regulatórios, ofereço também uma seção dedicada a possíveis pesquisas futuras, onde incluo exemplos e questões adicionais que coloquei e ponderei devido ao meu entusiasmo e interesse pelo tópico.

Palavras-chaves: iconicidade; séries policiais norte-americanas; produção de televisão; representação; cidade norte-americana.

Abstract

This Master's dissertation explores the intersection where iconicity, the city, media and television studies meet. Expanding my curiosity about the city representation in visual media and drawing upon the considerable impact exerted by television on the representation of reality, I try to expose the ways in which that influence transpires not only from the content but also from the industry's practices. I narrow my research to North American police and crime dramas, which have shaped my imagination and understanding of how cities like New York City, Chicago, Baltimore, or Las Vegas look and operate. The final visual representation of city spaces is not the only element of television productions that affects spectators' understanding towards the city, yet some visual images intuitively seem more powerful than others—those which could be classified as iconic.

Therefore, the core of this project focuses on presenting the notion of iconicity, its intricacies and challenges as to its definition (Chapter 1), and on marrying it with the city iconicity on television as well as with the television industry and production to divulge how the choices and practices of this entertainment industry and around it shape the image of the city employing iconicity (Chapter 2). The crime dramas will be exemplified by *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation*, created by Anthony E. Zuiker, and *The Wire*, from under the pen of David Simon (Chapter 3). The analysis of television is supported by two media studies works: the first is an article where Timothy Havens, Amanda D. Lotz, and Serra Tinic propose their concept of the critical media industry studies; the second, based on Jonathan Gray and Amanda D. Lotz's *Television Studies*, the multimodal approach to television studies which requires a look into four areas revolving around the medium: programs, audiences, industry, and context.

Keywords: iconicity; north american crime drama; television production; representation; north american city.

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Introduction

In New York
Concrete jungle where dreams are made of
There's nothin' you can't do
Now you're in New York
These streets will make you feel brand-new
Big lights will inspire you
Let's hear it for New York
New York, New York (Jay-Z, Alicia Keys)

As impactful as Jay-Z's artistic work and entrepreneurship have been on American culture and society, one could not have predicted the exact imprint the above-quoted song would leave on the United States and beyond. Combined with its black-and-white music video featuring a wealth of photographs and video snippets of New York City as well as the rapper's and Alicia Keys' New York origins and experiences, the song is a ballad about and for the city. When I visited there in June earlier this year, the song was not only on replay on television in bars and food places. It was *the* anthem of the city, impossible to avoid when sightseeing on the Brooklyn Bridge or the Rockefeller Observation Deck, where special devices for taking "selfies" were installed—and where the song's chorus in the background aptly evoked people's memories and emotions, thus adding yet another layer of experience from the Big Apple. Consequently, these personal experiences and memories are implicitly tied to the music's theme, which strongly emphasizes the message around New York City as a place where dreams come true. The lyrics, the video clip and its nostalgic visuals, the discourse around Jay-Z, and the rapper's attitude towards the city, as well as the repeated reinforcement, contribute to the iconic, lasting, and recognizable status of New York City, domestically and globally.

However, this project will not be about New York, music videos, or music television. Nor will it be about the iconicity of the musicians. In this short paragraph I wanted to illustrate that city iconicity is rendered visible when one decides to pause and think not what roles the city can play in our lives, but how we, as social and cultural agents, give meaning to it on media and

entertainment, and how we shape and utilize the available processes and tools to ascribe it. My main purpose is to focus on the point where the city, television, and iconicity meet.

In terms of the boundaries of this project, I will be using the example of the North American context as a continuation of my academic and personal interests about the culture of the United States. Cities, especially when seen at night, have always seemed mysterious and magical to me. They appear integral and seamless, yet when observed closely or for a longer period of time, their constituent parts along with their distinct meanings and provenances become conspicuous. Consequently, the city's polysemous nature is difficult to be uniformly defined. Television, likewise, seems omnipresent, whole, never-stopping when we switch on the TV set. Yet, it consists of an aggregation of programs inserted into the programming and scheduling like bricks in a firm wall. Each show is distinctly shaped and structured by various groups of industry workers, *e.g.* producers, directors, costume designers, from various backgrounds, and with diverse expertise and experiences, private and professional. Even with the same plotline, setting, and characters, any final production will be like any other because of how it is influenced by the people who create it. Furthermore, North American television productions span multiple decades, trends, genres, socio-cultural and politico-economic influences, and could offer a myriad of examples for the study of city iconicity. I am, thus, forced to narrow my analysis to two police/crime dramas produced in the United States, which I believe are exceptional specimens to discuss the city within, and how it is subject to the process and power of iconicity. The first one—*CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* (2000-2015)¹ created by Anthony E. Zuiker and set in Las Vegas, Nevada—is a crime procedural that rose to global fame and belovedness. The second enters *The Wire* (2002-2008): a highly esteemed and critically acclaimed television serial by David Simon located in Baltimore, Maryland. Both were produced and distributed at the beginning of the 2000s, but their television homes, creators, visual styles, and even audience reception differ. Analyzing how city iconicity is constructed, I track how particular choices and practices may contribute to the final creation of or sustenance of city icons on visual media.

Chapter 1 presents the challenges of defining what icons and iconicity are. The root of the word “icon” can be traced to its Greek language origins. Over the centuries and under foreign influences and appropriations, both the word and its use have evolved and been applied in a

¹ I will refer to this specific series as *CSI* in the remainder of this dissertation. If the other series of the *CSI* franchise are mentioned, I will explicitly indicate their names.

broader spectrum of studies, *e.g.* art, aesthetics, religion, linguistics, or even celebrity studies. However, instead of defining and clarifying semantic intricacies of the concept of an icon and its derivatives, I will offer an introduction to lexical terms of “icon” and “iconicity,” borrowing theoretical knowledge from linguistics, semiotics in particular, and will propose my definition applicable to the context of this project. The body of the chapter will be divided into sections devoted to separate areas of study where iconicity has been incorporated—the list of these areas is far from exhaustive on the topic of iconicity. The subchapters will, thus, introduce more theoretical aspects as well as, hopefully, interesting examples of icons in general, with a particular focus on city icons. Embarking on the research on iconicity and television opens a web of interconnections between these two notions and a myriad of others, from which I have selected: visual linguistics (ch. 1.2), design, marketing and (city) branding (ch. 1.3), architecture (ch. 1.4), metonymy (ch. 1.5), as well as television and film (ch. 1.6). On various occasions of this mapping, I will emphasize the role of visuality and materiality of where the icons appear and what forms they adopt. In the last part, an attempt will be made to summarize the chapter and direct the research towards the visual spectacle of television.

As I will demonstrate in Chapter 2, iconicity and representation on television depend to an extent and cannot be reduced only to the visual representation in finalized works, distributed on a broadcast channel or—more commonly today—a streaming platform. To make my study about television more inquisitive, I will apply the approach presented by Timothy Havens, Amanda D. Lotz, and Serra Tinic in their article about critical media industry studies (CMIS, for short) as well as the four pillars of television studies suggested by Jonathan Gray and Lotz in *Television Studies*. Such a multifocal approach should invite a more in-depth critique of television as a medium, crime drama as an end product, along with the concept of city iconicity transmitted and included therein.

Television has always exerted a considerable impact on how we consume entertainment content, from television narrative shows, reality TV programs, music videos and ambiance recordings, to commercials. The analysis of television seems, however, contradictory: encompassing the televisual opulence on one hand will obscure the details; evoking especially-curated and isolated examples will risk generalization and losing sight of tendencies and practices. Therefore, when discussing this subject from an angle other than the political economy, which approaches the television industry on a macro level, Havens, Lotz, and Tinic

propose a new methodology: one to uncover the knowledge, practices, and power relations occurring on the industry's area of "the production of entertainment programming." The authors note the existing "neglect of quotidian practices and competing goals," when television industry analysis is considered, "which are not subject to direct and regular oversight by corporate owners, and which define the experiences of those who work within the industry." Additionally, approaching television through the political-economy spectrum, "there is a reductionist tendency to treat [television and popular culture in general] as yet another form of commodified culture operating only according to the interests of capital." Most importantly, however, Havens et al. emphasize that "[t]here is little room to consider the moments of creativity and struggles over representational practices from that vantage point" (236). In other words, television cannot be seen exclusively as a sellable asset and service, controlled by global economic forces and the demand for entertainment. Neither can it be reduced to "end products such as media texts and audience interpretations" that cultural studies endorse and reach for regularly as singled-out examples (247). Television programs are highly collaborative productions that require dozens of specialists in fields spanning from production, storytelling, economy, to technical areas like camera operation, lighting, make-up, and carpentry, to digital professions of special effects or sound artists. At the same time, in the globalized world today, television is made simultaneously to global markets and niche audiences. Consequently, some high-level decision-making processes need to be implemented to monitor and approve the productions and their quality.

Nonetheless, due to the collaborative nature of television, and its framing between major economic forces and a wealth of audience groups, the industry workers—creators, producers, actors, writers, directors, and so on—have to negotiate their creative "vision" with the agents on the macro and micro levels, as well as with the television consumers. Drawing from Michel Foucault's theory of the discourse and Antonio Gramsci's writings about power relations, the scholars emphasize that "power and resistance are mutually constitutive," which offers a new perspective "into the ways that cultural workers maintain some degree of agency within the larger constraints imposed by the structural imperatives of the media industries, their owners, and regulators" (247). And, what is of particular importance for this project, they resume that "[i]t is within the ambiguity and complexity of the processes that lead from story ideas to their constituent production decisions, as contextualized within network goals and regulatory environments, that we can begin to understand the material 'products' that have come to engage

media studies scholars” (247). Thus, Chapter 2 contains the historical and basic economic context of television at the time when *CSI* and *The Wire* were produced and released, but its remaining parts will follow this methodology to provide a mid-level industry perspective on the television production in the light of city iconicity.

Accompanying the CMIS approach, the quaternary perspective on television studies, even if narrowed by the regulatory constraints of this project, will help to structure the theory and Chapter 3’s analysis into segments. Gray and Lotz begin their work by historicizing the emergence and development of cultural and media studies, which branched into several subfields, including television studies. They outline the approaches of social sciences, humanities, and finally cultural studies to contextualize these fields’ trends and focal points in the context of media analysis. Television studies should be of concern to researchers, and consequently has received a growing interest by both academics and audiences, because television is “a repository for meanings and a site where cultural values are articulated” (Gray and Lotz ch.1). Moreover, their approach

assumes television is a key part of lived, everyday culture in contemporary society and one which may allow us to understand large parts of that culture. [Television] is also an industrial entity produced under specific conditions that require analysis precisely because it is one of our society’s primary storytellers, a resource and tool for learning, deliberation, debate, and persuasion, and a site wherein power and ideology operate. (ch.1)

Television-focused field of study is distinctive when approaching its subject matter because, “[w]hereas other disciplines may study television with a solitary interest in its programs, its audiences, its producers, or its history and context, television studies sees each of these as integral aspects” (ch.1). Consequently, Gray and Lotz establish and discuss in detail the following four “pillars”: programs, audiences, industries, and context.

The first pillar—programs—considers television content and various approaches to its analysis, close analysis and textual analysis in particular, given their dominance in cultural and media studies. The two researchers note, however, that “‘close reading’ and textual analysis are approaches developed in the western humanistic tradition as far back as Aristotle, television wasn’t being read closely with any real rigor until well into the 1970s” (ch.2). Curious enough,

the technological developments have propelled the interest in and possibilities of investigating television:

studying early television programs closely...neither viewers, scholars, nor critics could control the flow or timing of television...[U]ntil the VCR became a ubiquitous technology in the 1980s, close analysis could only be conducted on the fly, during the first screening. Even critics writing for popularly read journalistic outlets faced the odd task of watching something and then writing a review of it for publication the next day, although no one would subsequently be able to see the program reviewed. (ch.2)

Nevertheless, the textual analysis of television programs had still been present before we could record or rewind television shows, and was influenced by various functioning methodologies across other fields of study, including literary studies and art, rhetorical analysis, film studies, and linguistics. Television content could also be investigated through the prism of ideology and examined by gender studies, social studies, and ethnology. In other words, the same television show, season, episode, or even a scene can be dissected and interpreted in each of these fields' original perspective. Additionally, some studied the subject matter in aesthetic and evaluative frames, like in literary studies, others were inclusive of mundane, every-day items—like ideology and ethnology—which discursively included television. Programs would also include the study of genres, whose categorical distinctions have become increasingly blurred. Finally, this pillar, thus, would turn attention to the end material produced by the television industry.

The second pillar is devoted to audiences. Without spectators who consume television, react to it, comment and discuss the content, and, obviously, pay for the broadcast or streaming access, television would not have gained its prominence. However, their importance to television studies does not emerge in the consumption in quantities—very important for the economy—but in *how* they see, interpret, and understand television programs. The paramount research into a more thorough study of audiences was presented by Stuart Hall, representative and former director of Birmingham's Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS). Hall offered two key theories: the decoding/encoding model and the approach considering representation as a signifying practice. Both of these are further presented in later chapters, as both have had a critical impact on how we can study culture and media. Throughout several decades since the audience research began, as summarized by Gray and Lotz, both audiences and academic studies about them have changed. Nonetheless, one point should be emphasized: the research shifted from seeing the

spectators as passive recipients to active participants of the televisual experience, who control what, when, and where to watch, and accept or deny the meaning included therein (ch.3).

Gray and Lotz move to discussing the industry in the following chapter. How the production processes look, who has the power to decide which content is accepted or not, what factors are considered when broadcast scheduling is organized, and other similar questions are crucial to better understand television as a social and cultural concept because they inevitably shape the end material. As the two writers note, “[i]f viewers have long referred simply to an ominous ‘they’ that might include the writers, the network, the schedulers, the producers, or others, television studies’ examination of television’s industries aims to flesh out how ‘they’ work” (ch.4).

The fourth and last pillar is the context. The three previous segments “are all situated, of course, historically, spatially, and in relation to one another, and thus a proper study of television programs, audiences, and industries requires that we inquire into the many contexts that surround these other agents that give them meaning, and play a key role in creating and nurturing them.” Furthermore, Gray and Lotz point out that “[c]ontextual analysis examines the spaces and meanings between program, audience, and industry” (ch.5). Historical events, social and cultural trends, technology available at a specific time, and political sentiments are among many contextual elements that can tell us more about the things we view on television, and media in general.

As the readers will observe, the pillars’ order is reorganized in this dissertation. Yet, it was necessary in order to imitate the television production flow which I intend to present, from the idea conception through development to distribution and reception. Thus, the second chapter opens with a brief historical overview to then introduce the context of television at the beginning of the century, the available technology, and two main but not only systems of distribution: broadcast and cable television, as well as their financial and scheduling organizations (context). Keeping the focus on how the decision-making at different stages of production influences the representation of the city, I discuss the creators and producers’ experiences and viewpoints on the city (industry), the selection of locations for filming (industry), the audiences and their different reception categories towards cities (audiences), and, finally, the visual style of television shows that shape the representation (programs). The visual style and mise-en-scène are both extensive and multi-element topics that could constitute separate research subject matters.

Consequently, for the analysis of city iconicity, I consider mainly the camera work and types of shots applied: aerial/bird's-eye/skyline shots and extreme long shots, including the B-roll footage. When contrasted with the premise of the show, structure of episodes, distribution models, creators's intentions, and reception, the analysis of the visual elements can reveal interesting conclusions.

Lastly, both chapters contain multiple examples reaching beyond crime dramas or cities as icons to enrich this project for popular-culture-savvy readers, and to suggest potential paths for further research. The third chapter, on the other hand, will spotlight the two police dramas introduced earlier, *CSI* and *The Wire*. Their analysis is organized in the same way as the previous sections, retracing the theory and the industry's areas outlined in Chapter 2 while uncovering the power of television production and practices in sustaining the concept of city iconicity outlined in Chapter 1. Lastly, the analysis of visual components would amount for little without aids, therefore I will incorporate a group of frames from both episodes when discussing their visual style.

The final part of the dissertation comprises both Conclusion and Paths for Further Research. The former offers the summary of my work and provides my final thoughts and findings around it. The presentation of the two case studies is not aimed at introducing a qualitative comparison *between* them, but rather at manifesting distinct ways in which television crime shows may exert an impact on city iconicity, depending on the content, context, industry, and audience at the time. Paths for Further Research include questions, ideas, and considerations I encountered while conducting the study and writing this dissertation. I hope some of them will encourage both new discussions and research topics. Prior to all that, however, I invite the readers for a short trip to Las Vegas and Baltimore.

I. Iconicity. Icons are all around us.

Iconicity. Symbols. Stars. As we communicate globally, instantly, and in an increasingly image-focused way, we tend to use these three words freely and intuitively. We usually do this to emphasize the importance of a person, an object, a statement, a speech, or even an event or a phenomenon by attributing special recognition to their existence and providing continuity to their socially or culturally accepted iconic status. In the twenty-first century, any ideas, opinions, and criticism can be easily shared thanks to the internet and technological advancements, and especially on omnipresent social media. There is no doubt that posts, hashtags, shares and “likes” are at the disposal of television producers, marketing and Public Relations teams, and other industry-related workers to identify if a specific product is popular and, over a period of time, if it maintains a specific status and point of reference among the audiences. Beyond merely monitoring such state of interest and trends in spectatorship, the producing companies actively release promotional content (branding, marketing *etc.*) via various media channels and reuse their older content. One of the examples would be the critically acclaimed HBO drama series *The Wire*.² for its twentieth anniversary, HBO and Campside Media produced an eight-episode podcast, where creators and actors of the series reminisce about the series. Given this, can we say that *The Wire* is iconic? Or that Baltimore has become iconic?

Looking globally, even with the easy dissemination of information online, what seems to be of essence in terms of iconicity is the mode of representation and the context of when, where, and how a person behaved, a spectacular view was photographed and reproduced in copies, or where and how an object was used and represented. In other words, with the massively shared content every second, the repetition itself is one of, but clearly not the only argument for the iconic status.

To take an example, for 1950s and 1960s generations contemporarily and for cinephiles, Marilyn Monroe is one of the cult cinema names. For others with a lesser exposure to the pre-1970s North American cinema, her persona might be easily overshadowed by the status of more contemporary actresses: her films and images are not as broadly shared today—technical and technological reasons aside—as opposed to constantly released online content about celebrities, singers, actresses and other women leading in the social media follower counts.

² The creators of *CSI* fall in the same trend as they have announced a *CSI*-themed podcast on the occasion of the franchise’s 2021 revival with *CSI: Vegas* that premiered on CBS (Andreeva).

However, when Kim Kardashian wore Monroe's famous "Happy Birthday" dress for the 2022 Met Gala, the costume had already been iconic thanks to Monroe's performance at the birthday event for President Kennedy in 1962 (Ott). Kardashian did not simply reuse the same dress. She used its iconic and scandalous status to create a media buzz and a controversy, to some extent, maintaining or possibly raising the number of posts, articles, and tweets about the 2022 event and herself (Kernan).

Although changing with decades, films, and the actors playing the protagonist, James Bond's car has remained one of the British character's iconic attributes. On their website, as part of the promotion campaign of *No Time to Die* (2022), Aston Martin created a specific page with the "Bond Collection" of their cars which featured in the famous spy franchise. As they introduce the selected vehicles, the linkage of time and film representation of their cars over the decades is emphasized: "Featuring four iconic Aston Martins from the past, present and future, *No Time To Die*, the 25th James Bond film sees Bond return to active service to complete a treacherous mission" ("*No Time to Die*"). The Aston Martin cars would have been produced for the general buyers regardless of the films, but their regular appearance and positive reception by the cinema audiences raised and grounded their status as iconic.³

Marrying the city theme of this dissertation with the aforementioned Met Gala of 2022, it is worth quoting American actress Blake Lively, whose dress material changed color: "I patinaed [sic], I arrived copper, and then, like New York City classic architecture, I patinaed. [Showing parts of her dress in front...] This is detailing from the Empire State Building. [...and on the hip] Some of the draping from the Statue of Liberty. [Turning to the tail of the dress] This is constellations [sic] from Grand Central Station" ("The Biggest Red Carpet Moments"). Lively is one of the most frequently quoted actresses for best dresses, and her costume from the Met Ball is a perfect example of how recognizable city details and symbols can be eternalized in a different, material form—fashion.

What these three examples have in common with the iconicity of city imagery in television is the link between media presence/representation in the material/visual form and their status commonly agreed upon as iconic (Monroe's dress, Bond's Aston Martin, and New York

³ It is intriguing to note that the iconic status does not depend on the price and value of the car, as one could expect. Two prominent examples would be the very well-known in Great Britain Mr. Bean's Mini (the word "iconic" is used four out of five times to describe the car itself on their website mini.com!; "Mr. Bean's Mini") or the car-turned-time-machine from *Back to the Future* (1985).

City's architecture). The frequent and intensive dissemination of pictures and films contributes to iconicity, but what I will argue throughout this dissertation is that iconicity depends as well on how the imagery is constructed and situated in a context, beginning at the stage of idea conception to development and production, to scheduling, to reception and visual styles. In other words, the way a person, an object, or a location can become iconic depends on the visual technique of representation in a specific medium but that technique does not simply or organically happen. It is carefully procured and designed by the creators and producers to present it as such. Having limited space, however, my main focus is on television to investigate the use of extreme long shots and bird's-eye view shots in two North American crime dramas, juxtaposed with the motivations of the creators for producing specific stories in the selected locations, the types of commercial and paid television scheduling systems, the production process and on-location filming characteristics, and audiences' possible readings of such selected shots. Yet, before we engage with the television medium and industry and with the qualitative analysis of the case studies introduced in Chapter 3, we should first focus on the iconicity concept itself.

1.1. Iconicity and Its Definitions

Prior to quoting the definitions of iconicity, we should ponder over the term's root: "icon." Both terms, "icon" and "iconicity," exist in domains beyond cultural studies, and can be defined in a very contextualized manner or, contrarily, be vaguely described, allowing for a more free interpretation. As *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary* tells us on their website, an icon is "a person or thing widely admired especially for having great influence or significance in a particular sphere" or a synonym to an "EMBLEM, SYMBOL" or, originating from the digital era, "a: a graphic symbol on a computer display screen that represents an app, an object (such as a file), or a function (such as the command to save) / b: a sign (such as a word or graphic symbol) whose form suggests its meaning / c: archaic : a usually pictorial representation : IMAGE." Moreover, specifying the area to the Eastern Orthodox Christianity, an icon can be used to signify "a representation (as in a mural, a mosaic, or a painting on wood) of sacred events or especially of a sacred individual (such as Jesus Christ, the Virgin Mary, or a saint) used as an object of veneration or a tool for instruction" ("Icon" [*Merriam-Webster.com*]). In *Cambridge Online Dictionary*, an icon is first defined as "a small picture or symbol on a computer screen

that you point to and click on (= press) with a mouse to give the computer an instruction,” then “a very famous person or thing considered as representing a set of beliefs or a way of life,” followed by “a painting, usually on wood, of Jesus Christ, or of a person considered holy by some Christians, especially in Russia and Greece”⁴ (“Icon” [Cambridge]). Two out of these four definitions seem to be rather fixed (in the computer science and art history fields), the third being highly dependent on the cultural, sociological, and historical context, and the fourth bringing a headache to some semioticians, whose distinction of icons and symbols is hereby erased or merged.

Firstly, an icon understood as a famous person or object does not inherently possess recognizability and iconic status. An individual, an item, or an event is known and referred to as an icon or iconic, bearing specific “influence or significance,” only when a group in a given social or cultural context recognizes them as such. Monroe’s iconic “birthday dress” would hardly be iconic if not for the convergence of her wearing the dress to President Kennedy’s birthday celebrations and the following media and public interest. Bond’s car would not be iconic unless it has been repeatedly shown as one of his attributes and time and again destroyed in his fight against international criminals. There is also a possibility that New York City’s architecture would not be deemed iconic had it not been for the city’s being constantly mythologized on the big and small screens. In Stuart Hall’s theory, the dress, the car, and the architecture would be elements of a broadly understood language system that serves to help us construct a system of representation and meanings within a specific culture. In other words, Monroe’s dress, for example, bears a specific value in the Anglo-Saxon culture and cinematic circles, but it may not signify anything of importance in a society or culture where women, their attributes and involvement in general society’s functioning is restricted (1-30). As Hall explains, “it is not the material world which conveys meaning: it is the language system or whatever system we are using to represent our concepts. It is the social actors who use the conceptual...[and] representational systems to construct meaning, to make the world meaningful” (25). Furthermore, the exemplary objects and the city’s architecture would be ordinary elements of the world without their special meanings attributed to them by those “social actors.”

⁴ For conciseness, I use only the main *Cambridge Online Dictionary*’s definitions of “icon” and “iconicity” and do not include American Dictionary and Business English terms.

Secondly, appearing only in the *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*, an icon is termed synonymic to an emblem or a symbol, which clashes to an extent with the distinction identified by semioticians. The initial point to understand this clash lies in the work of Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure and in structuralist concepts, whose “common characteristic is an interest in the systems, the sets of relationships, the formal structures that frame and enable the production of meaning”—concepts which exerted a considerable influence on cultural studies (Turner, *British Cultural Studies* 10). According to Saussure, language is an organizing system of communication that works by convention within a specific group and context. What it means is that we, as a social and a cultural group, “agree” to refer to an object or a phenomenon by using a specific word, for instance, “lightning,” but there is nothing inherent in the lightning itself that would establish it as “lightning.” Additionally, there are countless languages, variations and dialects around the world that name the same things and events with different terms. Saussure, thus, distinguished two concepts within a language: *langue* (identified with the form of a language) and *parole* (comprising the possible expressions we can produce by using the forms offered by *langue*)(12). Echoing Turner’s (and thus Saussure’s) words according to which “the relation between a word and its meaning is constructed, not given...[l]anguage is cultural, not natural, and so the meanings it generates are too,” this language-to-reality convention becomes more sophisticated as a form of communication when we observe that one word may not have one referent only, and the same word in different languages can describe various things (11). We have seen above that “icon” can have four different definitions. Moreover, expanding the concept of language as a form, we communicate not only with words, written or spoken, but with a number of images, gestures, as well as practices and culturally anchored signs and symbols. We need to leave the linguistic field and turn to another domain to further understand why icons and symbols are not entirely synonymical.

Semiotics is a study of signs and signification processes which helps us to find, analyze and understand signs in multiple contexts around us along with their meanings and codes, sometimes recognized instantly, at other times hidden and in need of in-depth analysis. The main concept to understand here is that, according to semioticians, a sign consists of two elements: a signifier and a signified. A signified is “a mental representation” of an object or a phenomenon in the real world it refers to (Barthes 42). A signifier, however, can have multiple forms and its “substance... [is] always material (sounds, objects, images)” (47). In other words, the signifier

can be a written word, a sound, a color, a person, a plant and so on. Most relevant to quote here is Jeremy Butler's mention of C. S. Peirce's research, in which the latter distinguishes three kinds of signs: "1. the indexical sign, or index; 2. the iconic sign, or icon; 3. the symbolic sign, or symbol." The first type is physically caused by something or someone, e.g. smoke would be an indexical sign of a fire. An iconic sign is a resemblance of what it stands for, and, as the television and film scholar explains, "[p]hotographs and most images on television are icons." An image of a character sitting in a chair is, in his words, "an iconic signifier" of that character (437). It is crucial to note here the use of the word "iconic," which is used commonly to refer to people, objects, or places falling under the first definition of an icon. The third kind of a sign, a symbol, is conventional and its provenance or associated meanings are culturally established in a specific context. A table is called a "table" only because of the English language convention rather than any physical imprint or form, similarly to the "lighting" term. Having discussed this distinction of sign types, we can observe that the second definition offered by *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary* could be misleading in some situations.

The third explanation of an icon can also be traced to S.C. Pierce's categorization, to the iconic sign specifically. With the rapid development of computers and electronics, the use of not only icons on computer screens but also emoticons and emojis available on screen keyboards have become much more popular.⁵ Given their achieved complexity in a short period of time, it should suffice to say that some emojis have shifted to the symbolic signs, while still bearing their iconic values, depending on the context and meanings attributed by the senders and recipients.

The last definitions in both dictionaries place the term "icon" in the field of art history. On the website of the Tate Galleries, we can read that "[a]n icon was originally a picture of Christ on a panel used as an object of devotion in the orthodox Greek Church from at least the seventh century on. Hence the term icon has come to be attached to any object or image that is outstanding or has a special meaning attached to it" ("Iconography"). As much as the first sentence repeats what both English online dictionaries have told us, what we should emphasize here is the second part: it circles back to the first definition of an icon, stressing the important meaning or value that is ascribed to it. As iconography is explained by Tate in the same entry,

⁵ Emojis are a valuable example for further study of how our societies have shifted from literate and text-based to more image-oriented societies. By sending an icon or a few of them in a message, the sender may save time instead of typing several words or sentences. Yet, simultaneously, this "efficiency" can cause misinterpretation and misinformation if the same icon or symbol is read by the recipient in a different manner.

“the meanings of particular images can depend on context” (“Iconography”). In the media, iconography is as important. Butler clarifies that “[n]arrative...makes extensive use of the preestablished iconography of the real world. *Miami Vice* is a particularly good example of this. The program’s opening credits consist of a collage of Miami sights (and sites) and thus play on our associations with the city: Cuban culture, money, power, overheated sexuality, potential violence, and so on” (275). In other words, an icon could be defined as a resembling image of what it stands for, but it is fairly easy to observe that its definition is broader and infringes on how we as readers, spectators, interlocutors, and observers charge icons, or iconic signs, with meanings and values in specific contexts.

If defining an icon is not a simple task, trying to establish what iconicity stands for is not a simple deed either. *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary* offers only one definition of iconicity and explains it as a “correspondence between form and meaning” (“Iconicity” [*Merriam-Webster.com*]). *Cambridge Online Dictionary* echoes “the relationship between the form of a sign, such as a word or symbol, and its meaning” (“Iconicity” [*Cambridge*]). Both rightly stress that it is in the link between the form and the meaning where the iconicity is born. That relationship, however, is ephemeral as meanings can shift due to social and cultural changes. How much the definition of iconicity can be elusive, yet very present around us, is emphasized in Marco Solaroli’s article “Iconicity: A Category for Social and Cultural Theory.” There, he lists “at least” thirty fields in a “wide interdisciplinary spectrum of contemporary research” that have investigated, in their own capacity and methodologies, the concept of iconicity:

Visual culture studies, Art history, Aesthetics, Cultural studies, Cultural sociology, Cultural anthropology, Media sociology, Media studies (mainly film and photography), Visual communication, Journalism studies, Political communication, Semiotics, Religious studies, Philosophy, History, Literary studies, American studies, Urban studies, Memory studies, Cultural geography, Material culture studies, Science & Technology Studies, Consumption studies, Marketing, Architecture, Design, Psychoanalysis, Gender studies, Celebrity studies and Fashion studies – and, of course, all the possible intersections among them. (Solaroli 4-5)

Solaroli proposes to situate iconicity at the focal point in the social sciences, “analytically unpacking it, tracing its intellectual roots, identifying its constitutive elements, and assessing its

conceptual and empirical fertility in the description and interpretation of actual phenomena, within wider dynamics of power” (2-3). Considering the wide range of iconicity’s applications above, one must agree with Solaroli. In the next section, I will attempt to expose at least a minor fraction of iconicity’s functions and uses in order to better understand the concept and the power it can bear.

1.2. Iconicity and Visual Linguistics

I have already offered the key names of Saussure, Pierce, and Barthes when introducing the linguistic and semiotic concepts around signs, icons, and symbols. Nevertheless, with research evolving every day, I would like to introduce more contemporary researchers to the theoretical framework of this dissertation, whose work is partially or even clandestinely related to the topic hereby. First are the representatives of linguistics in the visual modality and cognitive science.⁶

The University of Birmingham in the United Kingdom maintains a YouTube channel offering multiple videos from its campuses of the students or staff, informational clips, as well as taster lectures from different departments. One of the available presentations is a September 10, 2022, session delivered by Marcus Perlman, titled “The universal language of iconicity.” Perlman first introduces the “Bouba-Kiki” effect to set the scene for his argument that will follow. In the experiment performed in class, Perlman displays a blob- or splat-looking shape and an uneven star-like shape, and asks the audience to associate the two words “bouba” and “kiki” with them. The cross-modal correspondence between the sounds of “bouba” and “kiki” and their visual forms—the splat and the uneven star, respectively—widens the scope of signs introduced in the previous section. Here, the two words do not have any meaning. The sounds resemble the shapes rather than a shape (a written word) resembling a concept (Perlman 00:01:45-06:46; 00:10:00-13). Yet, as Perlman argues throughout his lecture, it is thanks to iconicity in such a form which may allow us to communicate across languages even without speaking foreign languages, because we would no longer use the arbitrary convention of signs, but the iconic one (00:12:20-50).

⁶ For instance, David M. Sidhu talks about “Effects of Iconicity on Recognition Memory” in his presentation for The Cognitive Science Society’s conference held on July 30th, 2022. The speech can be found on YouTube via www.youtube.com/watch?v=KMFU9ZeRFos.

Before he refers to Saussure's definition of the sign and challenges the idea that all the signs are arbitrary, Perlman defines iconicity as

a quality of a signal—a signal is anything that we use to communicate. It can be spoken words. It can be gestures. It can be writing or drawings—in any modality...So we're looking at speech, but it could be any modality. We can think about iconicity from the perspective of producing and understanding [understanding words “bouba” and “kiki” even if they had no conventional meaning or producing shapes to match these words]...And then this is the key element of this definition: that we understand or produce a signal through a sense of resemblance between aspects of its form and aspects of its meaning. (00:10:15-11:16).

In his visual aid, the researcher adds that “iconicity grounds meaning and helps people understand each other without convention” (00:10:15-11:25). Thus Perlman's definition in a way develops the Saussurian and semiotic idea of iconic signs. We base our understanding on the signals in different modalities (spoken, written, visual) following their forms, not perceived and changing social and cultural meanings ascribed to, say, a building, when we call it iconic. Using Hockett's research, Perlman presents the traditional view that speech is one-dimensional, as opposed to drawings or written forms, and consequently, it will lack possibilities to explain our meaning, for instance for an elephant or a woodshed. The researcher, however, argues against these two traditional linguistics concepts and provides examples of onomatopoeias and ideophones (“[they] are basically like onomatopoeias, but they have a much wider range of meanings”), present in languages like Japanese, to prove his argument that we do not need to know a language to be able to communicate, although with some limits, by means of iconicity (00:20:40-50).

Fitting perfectly with the topic of this dissertation, Perlman concludes his lecture by showing a photograph of the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco, California, saying “I just want to make this case that iconicity is sort of this universal bridge that we can use to communicate across cultures” (00:31:25-35). He calls the bridge “universal” while using its characteristic and recognizable structure, its iconic red span featured in countless photographs, films, and television programs. Any iconic picture of any bridge would serve the idea of connecting two riverbanks to symbolize the connection between two different cultures joint in communication thanks to iconicity. Consciously or not, Perlman thus mobilizes iconicity on two

levels: linguistic, when he explains iconic words and their understanding across multiple languages; and visual, when he presents the famous San Francisco bridge.

Perlman's fellow researcher at the University of Birmingham, linguist Bodo Winter, is a lecturer in the Department of English Language and Applied Linguistics. He researches the iconicity and arbitrariness in languages (Winter, "About"). On May 5, 2022, Winter delivered a speech on this topic for the Brazilian Linguistics Association (Associação Brasileira de Linguística), Abralín, held on YouTube streaming. The scholar begins his presentation by recapitulating Saussure's contributions to the linguistics field—and beyond—and discusses the three types of signs I introduced above after Pierce. Mentioning the iconic signs allows Winter to present his definition of iconicity, which to him is

when iconic signs...are those where form resembles the meaning. So, for example, the American sign language sign for 'tree' clearly has aspects of the form that resemble [sic] the thing that's being talked about. And in spoken language we also have iconicity. So, for example, the word 'cuckoo' is a word that the form of which mimics the call of the bird...Iconicity is always about resemblance. (00:07:58-08:30)

Further, Winter states that "arbitrariness itself is not necessarily as useful but iconicity actually performs lots of important functions" (00:09:10-18). He establishes four general purposes of iconicity: language acquisition, language evolution, fine perceptual detail in adult communication, and having fun (funny words and gestures for more engaging storytelling) (00:09:20-13:22) and proceeds to list various domains where iconicity is used—he lists twelve of them: onomatopoeias, animal names, Pokémon, product (and brand) names, fiction (character names), nicknames, poetry, iconic prosody (speech rate), emojis, gestures, iconic signs in sign languages, ideophones—and concludes that "iconicity is a way of making meaning that finds outlets in different aspects of language" (00:17:35-45). It is worth noting that, looking from the linguistics and language perspective, Winter specifies product and brand *names*, but it can be expanded to visuals too, as we will see in the next section.

1.3. Iconicity (in) Design, Marketing, and Branding

When introducing this section on iconicity, I have mentioned design and brand marketing as areas which also mobilize iconic signs. Although it is not anywhere near the linguistic and literary definition, I would like to evoke the iconicity definition by Andrew Lawrence, which he

presented at the inaugural speech at Staffordshire University on May 17, 2021, also held via YouTube streaming. Global Executive Creative Director at elmwood, Lawrence explains the mindset and methodology his teams and creatives would have when creating designs and branding plans for their clients. He urges them to become storytellers following three concepts, the “Three I’s” tool: insight, idea, iconicity (00:06:00-55). Working towards an organized and structured manner of thinking, elmwood’s employees are encouraged to lean on insights that provide new perspectives on the product in question, followed by straightforward and pin-pointed, clearly-defined ideas that they can attempt to implement. The last stage is devoted to iconicity or, in Lawrence’s words, to “making something sticky” and working toward answering the question “How will we then bring our idea to life in a truly meaningful and memorable way?” (00:06:55-08:22).

Creating a brand involves not only creating a logo, but also a persuasive campaign around it and around the company that will incentivize customers or users to reach for their services or products from between other options available on the market. Fashion brands are most likely to come to mind in this case: choosing clothing and shoes from Nike or Adidas will inevitably be linked to the decades-long rivalry for customers, to name only two companies. The cultural legacy of such brands is further enhanced by their involvement in media, sports, and entertainment. They can be sponsors of sports teams’ equipment, have product placement agreements with movie production companies and television studios, and even become film-worthy subjects themselves, like in *Air: Courting a Legend* (2023) about the partnership between Nike and Michael Jordan.

Furthermore, films like *House of Gucci* (2021) and television series like the second season of *American Crime Story* titled *The Assassination of Gianni Versace* (2018) or *Halston* (2021) not only tell the stories of famous fashion designers but at the same time promote their fashion houses and brands. Multiple other productions contain products and references to places, buildings, or even practices—like having a coffee-to-go while rushing to the office. The examples multiply. Noelann Bourgade, for instance, adds to her article a category about brands that are inspired by television and film productions (Bourgade). *Emily in Paris* is an interesting case from the branding and marketing point of view, as it uses the recognizability of Paris (the series’ setting) and some assumed stereotypes about the French culture, mobilizes spectators’ knowledge about established fashion luxury brands like Prada and Chanel, and builds parts of the

narrative to promote a product in a way disguising itself as a televisual, ten-episode (in the case of the third season) advertisement of McBaguette, among other goods, sold at McDonald's in France (Mercereau). Only with these few examples can we already see how the iconicity of brands can exploit the cinema and television industries for marketing and commercial gains, or be used by those industries in product placement or narratives of whole productions, in conjunction with monetary gains.

Proceeding with his lecture, Lawrence indicates that “[b]rands are living narratives. They have a voice in the world that surrounds them and confronts a multitude of tensions” (00:12:00-10). In simple terms, to expand the semiotics’ notion of signs introduced earlier, brands’ logos, their names, or characteristic clothing designs can be seen as inscribed in social and cultural narratives. Customers, buyers, and spectators attribute personal meanings to those brands based on their individual practices around and experiences with their products. What is more, this meaning creation depends on specific contexts, understood as unique spatial, historical, ideological circumstances, and so on. Iconicity in brands and marketing can also be summarized as a shortcut in transferring specific values and messages. It is useful in cinema and television, ending in everyday social practices, where multiple pieces of information can be provided to the audience in the *mise-en-scène* in the first case, and to people we encounter at work or public spaces in everyday situations in the latter.

Thus far, I have listed examples related to products, businesses, or people. However, can a location be subject to branding? The answer is “yes.” Lawrence emphasizes “meaningful” and “memorable” as the two crucial traits in order to “make something sticky.” Can a place be meaningful and memorable? Yes. Place branding is one of the terms used in marketing and branding that aims to promote a city (city branding), region (region branding), or a country (nation branding) for multiple purposes such as attracting and maintaining tourism, incentivizing growth and development opportunities by mobilizing investors, and engaging the residents in social, cultural, and economic actions and events, which would further the area’s progress. As Leslie Sklair observes, “[t]hose who make money out of cities naturally want their cities to be easily recognizable for purposes of commerce, tourism, and investment, as well as civic pride” (42-43). Concurring in a similar strain of thought, Peter J.M Nas writes the following when he explains urban symbolism:

The symbol bearers...are perceived and manipulated in different ways. They are connected to emotions...They can dominate the city's image...the friction between official and counter-symbolism is often very meaningful. Knowledge of the full symbolic spectrum of a city allows manipulation, which may be in demand for various reasons, such as nation building...improving tourism...[or] for branding. Through the knowledge of urban symbolic ecology and city branding, the possibility to create a positive image towards the public is, to a certain extent, achievable. Urban symbolism consummates urban identity; it bestows the urban manager, the city planner, the architect and the common man the tools to mold the city into a vivacious piece of art. (19-20)

Consequently, the relationship between the city spaces, narratives, and their uses and purposes can be tracked to the political and commercial institutions alike.

As this section could develop into a book on its own, I would like to limit the next examples and focus on a specific case of branding, namely city and building branding on Instagram, given that the strategies hereby employed draw on and contribute to the iconicity of the architectural structures and the cities they promote. The CN Tower in Toronto, Ontario, Canada, the Empire State Building in New York City, and the Shard in London, UK, have their own Instagram accounts, @cntower, @empirestatebldg, and @shardview, respectively. Washington, DC, Chicago, Illinois, and New York City have their own accounts as well: @visitwashingtondc, @chicago, and @newyorkcity.explore. Not only do these profiles provide basic information about the locations, but simultaneously offer tips for potential visitors and insights about events, and share photographs and short (usually in a vertical format) videos (named “reels” in the Instagram jargon), including engaging with the social media users, re-sharing the tagged content taken by residents and tourists alike. This seems like a complex cycle of publishing visual content about a location which may attract the users, who in turn are producing their own photographs, “selfies,” and videos “experiencing” the place in person—be it a city or a specific building.

During the process of writing this dissertation, I had an opportunity to visit the CN Tower. Seeing the tourists and Torontonians alike in the observation deck, my feelings were somewhat contradictory: I tried and failed to understand the concept of taking countless “selfies” with the city in the background, which literally put the contemplation-worthy view of the city lights being turned on at dusk to the far background; yet, I also appreciated those who took their

time to simply sit and converse, observing the view outside, with their phones hidden in their pockets. Only after visiting the tower—and, admittedly, taking some photographs of the view as well—did I review its Instagram account. I was perplexed at the engagement of @cntower’s administrators with the platform’s users and their re-sharing of new content every hour: photos taken in the deck, during the EdgeWalk, from a distance, at the bottom of the tower looking straight up, during the day, in the middle of the night, with night lights for one or another occasion, when it was rainy, or when it was a sunny day. On top of this, the CN Tower’s website contains a lightning schedule, with names of the special occasions the lightning will celebrate, the calendar dates (usually more than one color scheme falls on one day), and a thin line with the programmed color range to visualize what the tower will look like (“Lighting Schedule”). It is also possible to watch the changing lights and the view to the east and to the west from the tower thanks to a few cameras installed at vantage points. The CN Tower is considered a Canadian icon, and the above practices and strategies contribute to the maintenance of its status, not only through repetition (of social media content) but offering experiences to the visitors that they would like to live through, thus constructing a specific narrative; through being constant as a structure, yet different every day thanks to its lighting program; and through its specific architecture, looming over the city center of Toronto, and contributing to a unique kind of memorable skyline. The image of the tower or even the skyline itself can then be reproduced on various items—a sticker and a few postcards in my case—as part of the branding, marketing and tourism. Here, the icon that is the CN Tower can stand for a full range of experiences and memories, not only visual and limited to Instagram posts and stories, but expanding to the material, personal and shared, spheres as well.

Nevertheless, chairman of the International Place Branding Association and advisor on place branding matters, Robert Govers clarifies that place branding is not simply based on logos and slogans that city halls and other governmental institutions can presume to successfully use to promote their areas. What the scholar alludes to is indeed related to the meaningfulness and memorability of a place.

The name or logo is the tool for identification and recognition, but the core of branding is to make sure that consumers attach distinctive associations to this entity (building reputation). In other words, a trademark only becomes a brand when it is recognised and represents meaning to external audiences. As places already have (more often than not

meaningful) names and landmarks, the amount of time and investment generally spent on designing logos and slogans as opposed to actual reputation management for places, seems to be a waste. (71)

Furthermore, he goes on to explain in detail the complexity of urban life that one logo might not be able to capture properly, including the multiple experiences, preferences, practices, and expectations on the side of the residents.

Places...are much more complex. Often, the mistake is made to treat the city or region as product [sic], which they are not. Places offer environments that allow for product offerings to be brought to international markets; such as tourism product market combinations, investment opportunities, exported goods, cultural offerings, employment and housing opportunities or international study programme offerings. It clearly shows that places are not even active in any particular industry exclusively and besides an environment for economic activities, places are spaces where people live, in which they move around, bring up their children, enjoy their work and leisure time, become ill and hopefully get treated in a well-organised healthcare system, are engaged in social, sport and cultural activities in associations and NGOs. To think that the awareness and reputation of all this can be influenced [sic] by the use of a logo or slogan seems to be rather naïve, to put it mildly. (72-73)

In addition, from the point of view of cultural studies, Govers mentions a very important concept, namely identity. As he explains, “places are under political pressure and consist of contested identities, so to summarise them in a simple logo and slogan can be highly controversial and often leads to very bleak concepts as a result of applying common denominators” (73). In other words, place branding should work upon the reputation, the identity, and the connections with the place that already exist in the society. John Hartley provides the example of *Australia* (2008), an unsuccessful attempt at “national branding” notwithstanding its “star power and the budget,” with Nicole Kidman and Australia-born Hugh Jackman impersonating the main characters (Hartley, “Branding” 38-39). Location branding may not be an easy deed and turn ineffectual, especially if the strategy misreads the feelings and mood of the place’s residents and tourists. Or it might disregard these attitudes and existing associations altogether, which Govers warns against. He concludes that “[it] is not the symbol that builds the reputation, but the symbol can become an icon for an existing reputation that has

been painstakingly built over a period of time” (74). This statement, however, seems discordant when compared with the approach on the side of architecture.

1.4. Iconi/City Architecture

Writing about city iconicity in visual media, a reference to architecture cannot be omitted as it is ultimately one of the utilitarian fundamentals in our social and urban life as well as one of the components for the other arts,⁷ from painting to performance to digital media and other cultural manifestations. It can also—surprisingly or not—embody in concrete terms ideologies related to and not limited to political, social, or economic forces, which was referenced by Dutch architect Reinier de Graaf in his lecture during “The Night of Architecture” (original name: “Noc Architektury”) in June 2015 at the Faculty of Architecture of the Slovak University of Technology in Bratislava, Slovakia. Graaf is also one of the partners at the Office for Metropolitan Architecture (OMA)⁸ established in the Netherlands, a published author and theorist on the topics of architecture and urbanism, and has been involved in more than seventy projects (“Reinier de Graaf”). In the aforementioned lecture, the architect attempted to answer the question “Is Iconicity Good for Architecture?” He does not reply to it directly, however, nor does he define iconicity, presuming that his audience recognizes the same assumed definition and meanings. Yet, he offers a few key and revealing comments about iconicity when he presents OMA’s projects.

In the contemporary world, architecture has become a very difficult thing to do. China Central Television wanted an icon but, today, everybody wants an icon (Graaf 00:05:55-06:10)...When everything is an icon, nothing is an icon. You have accumulative excitement that leads to a whole new form of boredom (00:06:47-55)...In the twenty-first century, bridges are no longer a means to get the shortest crossing from A to B. Bridges are icons...This [one of a bridge project proposals] is just to give an idea of the general production of how complex you can make a journey from A to B (00:25:03-25)...[introducing OMA’s proposal for a new bridge in London]...a series of white picture frames the city, a kind of a monument to simplicity, and in a way a

⁷ Considering that architecture is one of the arts itself.

⁸ OMA was founded in 1975 by Rem Koolhaas, the author of *Delirious New York* published in 1978.

monument...the anti-icon, which of course in a weird way is also an icon.
(00:27:55-28:07)

His statements reinforce the fact that iconicity is not only challenging to define but also contradictory, like in the anti-icon's case.

Afterwards, Graaf embarks on invoking the research of French economist Thomas Piketty⁹ to present a correlation between architectural trends focused on socialist principles in the twentieth century and the political changes from the outbreak of World War I in 1914 until the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. What we can conclude from his speech is that when social housing is concerned, the iconicity sweeps away from the focus. When capital and potential profits are involved, they buy not only physical structures to be built, but also iconic aesthetics and meanings. As already mentioned in the previous section, this would go contrary to what Govers claims about iconicity in the branding of places. Namely, the fact that place branding should draw from already existing prestige and values revolving around a structure or a location. In terms of architecture, it seems that when an entity commissions a project—especially when considerable budget and global exposure are concerned—the structure should be one-of-a-kind, remarkable, memorable, and identifiable with a specific region, culture, or values. However, to echo Graaf, when multiple clients require the same, the unusual becomes common, and does not attract much attention or “media buzz.” Extending this thought to the television industry, could we see the same city as the narrative's backdrop become redundant, boring, and ultimately uninteresting to the point where the spectators project this feeling onto the story and the whole production themselves? Given the expanse of audience groups and practices, this possibility cannot be discarded.

Yet, prior to entering into a different field, let us turn toward Sklair's research on iconicity in the architecture industry in his book published in 2017 and titled *The Icon Project*. He explains its premise very clearly in the introductory pages: his attempt is to discover the mechanisms and strategies of institutions, organizations, and agents labeled by Sklair as “TCC,” or “the transnational capitalist class,” which consists of “four overlapping fractions—corporate, political, professional, and consumerist” (3). His thesis statement, moreover, postulates that these entities “[mobilize] two distinct but related forms of iconic architecture—unique icons (buildings

⁹ Piketty's book *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* (2013).

recognized as works of art in their own right) and successful typical icons (buildings copying elements of unique icons) to spread the culture-ideology of consumerism” (3).

Henceforth, Sklair advances with the definition of iconicity and the difficulties of the process for its establishment (Chapter 1) and, in Chapter 2, presents in more detail the two types of iconic buildings: unique and typical, before moving on to marrying his explanations with each of the four pillars of the TCC in the later parts of his book. Investigating capitalism and globalization from the sociological perspective, the scholar proposes to “define iconic in terms of fame and symbolic/aesthetic significance. The more successfully a building can convey consumer-friendly meanings and consumer-friendly design, ideally combining the comfortable with the spectacular, the more value it will have in the market” (3). Iconicity is not innate to a place or a building on its own but derives from society’s views, interests, and values about the structure itself. Should it have a characteristic design, be situated in a meaningful context, and reflect the people’s memories or express their identities, the better for the building or structure’s renown. Sklair develops a similar point a few pages later, when he states that “iconicity is not simply a question of image or, by implication, fashion. Iconicity works and persists because the buildings in which it inheres are built by architects and teams of others to symbolize something (possibly several things) and to express aesthetic values, apart from the programme (functions) of the building itself” (18). In other words, iconic structures fulfill their basic functions as private or public, consumer or political buildings¹⁰ where people live, work, spend their free time, perform their duties and so on, but at the same time, at a different level, serve to provide, transmit, congregate, and eternize public memories, principles, and significant historic events. However, we should also emphasize, after Sklair, that “[the] idea that buildings and architects could be iconic emerged in the 1980s and has accelerated rapidly since then via the Internet” (26).

Prior to the technological revolutions and modern advancements, especially of the twentieth century, facilitating the dissemination of information in the form of text, numbers,

¹⁰ In his course *CitiesX: The Past, Present and Future of Urban Life*, economist Edward Glaeser explains in detail the process of creation and development of cities throughout the centuries. Iconicity-wise, first structures deemed iconic would belong to imperial and religious powers to manifest their monetary or divine magnificence. When the cities’ nature changed to trade cities and, later, to consumer cities, the purpose and choices for building particular structures and developing cities according to a specific (economic, political) ideology also influenced the physical shapes and the rhetoric around new buildings. The course’s content is not introduced in this dissertation in more detail, as it teaches about cities from the economy’s perspective. However, I offer here this brief note as a complement to the wider range of roles that buildings in cities can and have fulfilled.

images, videos, and instant communication, monumental buildings were still erected in various countries around the globe. Skair explains that

[before] the advent of capitalist globalization most iconic architecture was driven by religious or political elites, whereas since the 1960s the dominant driver of iconic architecture has been the TCC, led by the corporate sector. [This could be explained by 4 factors] (1) the electronic revolution that is transforming economic, political, and cultural life all over the world, (2) postcolonialisms, (3) the creation of transnational social spaces, and (4) new forms of cosmopolitanism. (26)

In this way, he does not only focus on defining iconicity, but its roots and motivations around it.

Contrary to an extent to Govers, who claims that place branding will be as successful and effective as the already existing fame and prestige of that place, Sklair reasons that iconicity is a product not so much on the side of the loosely understood public, but transpiring from plans and designs on the part of entities comprised in the TCC.

Iconicity in architecture (or indeed in any other field of endeavour) does not simply happen; it is the end result of deliberate practices created by specific people working in specific institutions...professional media of architecture and the general coverage of economic, political, and cultural news involving architecture and urban design in the mass media...Think, for example, of the very frequent architectural background establishing shots in TV news and current affairs programmes, which embed city, national, and global political, corporate, and cultural iconic buildings in our brains. The phenomenon of socially produced architectural icons in the global era is theorized here as an attempt to establish the existence of a hegemonic transnational practice explicable in terms of the culture-ideology of consumerism. (54)

A famous building will promote and “sell” products, programs, and lifestyles. A recognizable structure will invoke specific memories or values. A known skyscraper will be a shortcut for summoning stereotypes and associations. In summary, one iconic building will be polysemous, the variations depending on the contexts it has been implemented in, and the audiences’ experiences with it: individual or in group, direct or indirect. Finally, “[p]olitical elites have frequently employed architectural icons to influence the formation, expression, and marketing of city and national identities” (154). Thus, architecture will help specific institutions and organizations to make a statement about the building, city, region, or even the country it is

located in, and to create a symbol of identification for residents and foreigners alike. With the well-established entertainment industry, from sports to television, from mass audiences to individual viewers, it disseminates images and references to architectural structures, thus helping with the formation and maintenance of iconicity. In their work centered on metonymy in television series as a marketing tool for place promotion, William J. Sadler and Ekaterina V. Haskins allude to iconic images and their importance in attracting tourists. Thus, it is metonymy and their article we will address in the following section.

1.5. *Metonym/ic/onicity*

Metonymy¹¹ is a figure of speech in rhetoric, one of the field's tools which we can use to construct our messages. As *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary* reveals, it is “a figure of speech consisting of the use of the name of one thing for that of another of which it is an attribute or with which it is associated (such as ‘crown’ in ‘lands belonging to the crown’)” (“Metonymy” [*Merriam-Webster.com*]). *Cambridge Online Dictionary* provides a similar explanation: “the act of referring to something using a word that describes one of its qualities or features” (“Metonymy” [*Cambridge*]). By using metonyms, we refer to an institution, a person, a place, or an item in their entirety by association or attributes. Or the opposite. Because it is a rhetorical tool, metonymy can be applied in more complex communication than direct speech, when we substitute one word for another. For instance, television uses both sound and image. By the way how the plot constructs certain characters, or how characters interact with the space around them, we as viewers receive a specific message charged with meanings. That message can be and is constructed to show us a piece of carefully chosen, constructed, represented reality—we should remember that even if realistic, the television world is not real.

In *Communication, Cultural and Media Studies*, Hartley offers a lengthy definition of the metonym which explains the concept in better detail and more examples. As he says, a metonym is

A figure from rhetoric, where a part stands for the whole. ‘Silk’ stands for ‘lawyer’.

Metonym works the other way round too: whole stands for part: ‘The USA’ might refer to

¹¹ We should also note that another figure of speech, synecdoche, is frequently contrasted with metonymy. As metonymy refers to a part, an attribute, of the thing or a being it refers to, synecdoche works with the classification or categorization into groups and orders. In other words, human beings tend to organize knowledge about the world into categories. For example, “an Audi” belongs to “cars,” which is in a larger group of “vehicles,” whereas “the streets” could be a substitute for “the city.”

the government of that country, or its basketball team, or a presidential opinion – all of these are metonymic uses of the term ‘USA’. Metonymy may be used to identify a significant function: e.g. ‘hand’ for labourer, ‘squeeze’ for partner, ‘head’ for cattle. Along with metaphor, metonymy was thought by the linguist Roman Jakobson to be a fundamental mode of meaning creation. Where metaphor works through choice substitution (‘ice’ for ‘diamonds’), metonymy works along the chain of signification (the syntagm as opposed to the paradigm). Jakobson thought that realistic novels were metonymic – part of life standing for its entirety. News is metonymic on the same principle, whereas drama may be metaphoric. (Hartley, “Metonymy” 204)

We find a more in-depth explanation of metonymy and its complexity in Fiske and Hartley’s earlier book *Reading Television*, where they discuss it on the occasion of outlining the signification process (31). They factor two selected ways in which signs transmit meanings and in which they connect to each other: metonymy and metaphor (31-33). Besides echoing that metonymy works by association “of a mere attribute of an object to the whole object,” they approach the theories of Jakobson and Leach who expanded these two terms beyond traditional criticism in literary studies (31). Utilizing semiotics and the concepts of signs in communication processes, they write that when it comes to metonymy “the signification depends upon the ability of a sign to act as a part which can signify the whole.” Furthermore, metonymy is not only “capable of modifying its user’s perception of the signified,” but also “of making physical objects signify quite abstract concepts.” As they exemplify, “hands” can be a denigrating term used by an employer to signify a group of workers, while “(the) crown” can refer to a king or queen or, more abstractly, to the monarchical regime (32). Both metaphor and metonymy are used denotatively and connotatively, but Fiske and Hartley observe the latter to be predominant in the denotative (first) order of signification. As it happens, they provide a very relevant example of the city representation when they write that “a shot of a city street is a constructed metaphor of the specific street itself. But it is also and predominantly a metonym of the whole city or of ‘city-ness,’ for the realism of much television drama results from the metonymy of its setting at the level of manifest content” (33). In this way, visual representation or, more concretely, specific types of shots and how space is presented (clean, dirty, during daylight hours, in the night, and so on) can metonymically signify and transfer meanings.

Let us illustrate this with an example. In the science-fiction television series *The Expanse* (2015-2022), the majority of the action takes place in space or on other planets and asteroids, with only a small portion of the scenes (and this number decreases with every season) being set on Earth: mainly in New York City, a farm in Montana, a town in Alaska, and Baltimore in later seasons. The Earth's representatives at the United Nations are located in New York City. The core plotline revolves around a conspiracy that aims to provoke an interplanetary war between Earth, Mars, and the (asteroid) Belt. Consequently, when references to Earth are made, it is metonymically represented by the Big Apple and the politicians residing there. The plot does not consider other cities than New York City for its political power, and when the scenes on Earth change to a different location, it is because the viewers need to learn more about the characters' past, not because a war room is deciding on the planet's future. Thus, in this situation, New York City metonymically stands for Earth. This is done not only by the events of the plot, or by how characters talk, but also by how the physical place is introduced and displayed visually. Even though *The Expanse* is set in the future, when the action moves to the metropolis, the city vistas are shown for establishing shots, with existing buildings and structures, accompanied by futuristic computer-generated ones. They have their own rhetorical role, as explained by Sadler and Haskins.

Adopting the perspective that “postcard-like shots” employed in television series are a marketing tool to attract tourists to specific locations, Sadler and Haskins present how metonymy works in this persuasive process. First, they refer to Barthes and Eco to provide theoretical background on why and how television representation skews reality. As a tool for their analysis of five American television series, they evoke Kevin A. Lynch's vocabulary for analyzing “the image of the city”: paths, edges, districts, nodes, landmarks (201-2). Thus, specific elements of a city can be visually separated, extracted and emphasized, be charged with meanings implied by the creators and attributed by the audiences-turned-tourists. Each of these elements, as a group (all apartments) or as individual instances (as the Central Perk coffeehouse in *Friends* [1994-2004]), can rhetorically substitute the bigger part of the city, the series' location setting. To use the example of *Friends*: following characters between their apartments and public spaces where they usually socialize, the audience associates their experiences with how life goes on in the city in general. Sadler and Haskins push their theory further by claiming that such use of metonymic representations is a marketing tool to attract tourists to come to their city—in their

case New York City—and experience the way of life of the characters they have seen on television.

Contrary to “iconicity,” metonymy does not need much groundwork for its definition as a figure of speech; its explanation as a partial substitute for a bigger whole seems fixed. It is, however, interesting to note that even when writing about place marketing via television shows and citing Lynch’s categorization, the authors do not ponder the question of iconicity. They apply the terms “iconic” and “icons” instinctively, and mostly classify widely-recognized New York City structures as such when they list them as landmarks and referential anchors for the spectators, for instance, the Twin Towers (195). Additionally, they emphasize the city as a whole’s “iconic power” with “architectural icons” and “iconic parts,” which serves as an “iconic anchor off in the distance,” “the ideal icon” (196-97, 208-11). Curiously, they recognize the coffeehouses in *Friends* and *Felicity* (1998-2002) as iconic, because they were the models which have helped to promote the consumer culture around coffee shops since the late 1990s (206-7). This is possibly due to the fact that Central Perk (fictional) and Dean & DeLuca (real), respectively, were unique in their corresponding sitcom settings, with particular characters and contexts. Conversely, even though coffeehouses existed before the 1990s, their iconicity is built not because of their physical structure only—to link this point to the previous section on architecture—but thanks to the values and meanings ascribed to them by audiences from the TV shows they have seen.

Thus, Sadler and Haskins state that each of the represented city paths, edges, districts, nodes, landmarks can metonymically stand for the bigger picture—that is, for the complete picture of the city—by way of how they are used, emphasized, and repeatedly shown across multiple episodes. As they conclude, “[i]n each case, the image becomes an anchor that boils down the meaning of New York City to a metonymy, a part that stands for the whole” (212). Furthermore, “[t]he aggregation of the various metonymic representations shown on television transforms the city into a destination for tourists who come from all over the world to see if New York City is truly like it is on television” (213). In other words, the full scope of a city is limited to the locations frequented by the characters. Because of this exposure and focus on a small clipping, one building or space will be representative of the whole, the metonym. There is a relation between the repetition and reproduction of specific imagery, meanings ascribed to what it

represents (not real, but realistically looking spaces), the uniqueness, and the iconicity as referring to something recognizable, famous, recurrent in rhetoric, and considered remarkable.

Lastly, in terms of iconicity, metonymy is useful but dangerous. On the one hand, it helps to convey meanings in less or more complex ways. In television shows, the same setting at the characters' apartments does make a lot of sense since the plot talks about their vicissitudes. Once familiarized with the new series, characters, plotlines, and settings, the audience will immediately connote specific shots with meanings and create particular expectations when seeing similarities in later episodes, including locations and what might happen there in the following scenes. Some television series utilize establishing shots to lead the viewers more explicitly, especially in plotlines devoted to multiple characters and stretched over lengthy timelines, like *Sense8* (2015-2018) or *Game of Thrones* (2011-2019), or when their programming is interrupted by commercial breaks, and establishing shots serve as a way to signal to viewers they should return to the episode proper, for example in the *CSI* franchise. On the other hand, metonymy is delimiting. Focusing on specific city parts—which become symbols—only permits to glimpse a small portion of the cultural, political, and social intricacies the real location and its residents have. Additionally, with the continuous repetition of similar images, particular meanings can be more engraved in the consciousness of the audiences as opposed to others. This, in turn, can create bias, misinformation, or misconception of certain values and attitudes.

The cleaned-up paths, characters' romanticizing about the city, and convenient proximity shown in many television series are all repeated regularly on television. They all combine and attract tourists to the represented and fragmented, yet not real, city. There are motivations directing the selection of settings and how they are shown, including cases where the representation is not in a positive light. Analyzing the Big Apple, Sadler and Haskins hint at “the obvious choice because of [New York City's] significance in the media and American culture” when they discuss the dissonance of shows set in one location but produced in another (204). For whom this choice is obvious, however? The creators and producers, or the audiences, or Sadler and Haskins only? If New York City is an indisputable choice for the industry executives, there must be a reason why some, including critically acclaimed productions, have been located outside of New York City or other big urban areas altogether.

1.6. Iconicity in Television and Film

Iconicity in television and cinema could be understood twofold. Even though they have different production and distribution practices, both can be considered discourses that attempt to convey messages and communicate meanings via their visual content. Reaching to semiotics introduced earlier, both can be said to be carriers of signs in their respective systems of signification. Pierce's triad dividing signs into indexes, icons, and symbols would consequently mean that iconicity in television focuses on the system of signs and codes that are interwoven into the complex fabric of episodes, seasons, and whole series. Understood in this way, icons as signs would refer to each element of the *mise-en-scène* that is showcased on screen. My interest, however, is to ponder the televisual iconicity not in the linguistic terms but from the perspective introduced by Sklair, Govers, Solaroli and others, who link the term "iconic" to renown, fame, reception, repetition, and uniqueness across multiple fields. Thus, the second way of how iconicity in television and cinema could be understood is in their capacity to contribute to the formation of iconic personas, iconic scenes or quotes, iconic images, and the like.

It is not arduous to find references to film excerpts, famous quotes, pieces of apparel, or characters' attributes that have been deemed iconic. Indeed, looking for "iconic scenes" in Google Search returns an ample count of 1,670,000,000 results in only 0.39 seconds. Checked the next day, the count rose to 1,770,000,000 results in 0.31 seconds.¹² As the recording, dissemination, and storing of film and television content have become faster and better—mainly thanks to the development of the internet connectivity and cloud storage as well as more affordable and advanced recording gear—both media have and will continue to create new icons or to maintain status of some of the already established ones. For example nowadays, one can effortlessly access one of movie classics like *Taxi Driver* (1976) or *The Godfather* (1972), both including widely-agreed iconic scenes, on one of the streaming services. More countries are being added to the lists where streaming of particular platforms is available, via the original service or under syndication, like Paramount Plus in Portugal offered under SkyShowtime subscription. With such spread of information, the archival and reusable capacity of both media is unprecedented. Perhaps this is also why the rise to stardom and to the iconic status by individual persons like actors or celebrities has been growing. With easier access to content and exchange of information, audiences not merely browse through television programs *etc.* but also

¹² The searches were performed on May 19 and May 20, 2023.

give meanings and ascribe values to individuals, objects, and places by their opinions, actions, and activities online and offline.

When locations are considered, New York City is not only presumably the most represented American city in television and film, but in all likelihood also the most researched and investigated one, specifically when visual media are considered. To name just a few examples, *Planet of the Apes* (1968) shows a broken Statue of Liberty, King Kong scales the Empire State Building, characters from Woody Allen's *Manhattan* (1979) have a conversation while gazing toward the Brooklyn Bridge. These scenes have been named iconic and maintained their status for decades. At the same time, they present us with images of iconic structures from the American metropolis. One could ponder the question if these scenes would have become iconic should the buildings and the city be different? Opening a discussion of "what if" could bring us to a whole new chapter, but the short answer is "yes." This is because of the preexistent attitudes toward the locations, the audiences' readings, and the production choices that may all determine if and how an icon is made. The exposure on television and other media, however, is one of the key factors as emphasized by Skair in the context of architecture. The scholar explains that "[b]uildings and spaces that have been used in establishing shots or foregrounded in globally successful films and TV shows are almost guaranteed a type of public iconic status today, though this does not mean that members of the public who recognize the buildings can name either them or their architects" (51). Moreover, he adds that "[t]he more ubiquitous the exposure an icon receives the better for the Icon Project. The architectural icon has to be visible not only from as many points of the city as possible, particularly in its skyline, but also on TV news, backgrounds in TV programmes, newspaper and magazine articles, films, advertisements, and the Internet" (60). At the same time, we should be aware that television itself does not equal television series and programs exclusively but, today, encompasses an enormous streaming market, platforms like YouTube, and music videos.

When the latter is concerned, the iconic status of certain locations can be reinforced by musicians and bands. For instance, Drake, Jay-Z, J. Balvin, Dr. Dre, and Eminem¹³ have all released music videos from or about the cities they come from: Toronto, New York City, Medellín (Colombia), Compton in Los Angeles, California, and Detroit, Michigan. These videos,

¹³ Note the correlation between the hip-hop music genre and the musicians' explicit relationship with the cities they are from.

replayed on YouTube and music channels, augment the exposure of the cities, visually and rhetorically.

Closing this mapping of iconicity in the fields related to city, architecture, representation, communication, and visual media, in the next section, I propose how I understand iconicity for the purpose of this dissertation and the case studies. In Chapter 2, I will present some dependencies and motivations behind the production and creative processes as well as programming and audiences' perspective that may influence the choice of particular locations as settings and the methods used to visually represent them. In this way, I would like to establish what practices and approaches can contribute to iconic, yet superficial, visual representations of cities as opposed to those that may generate iconicity on a deeper level, stripped from iconic embellishments. Based on the mapping of a few fields which tackle iconicity, and the industry practices, I will then turn to my two case studies: Baltimore of *The Wire* and Las Vegas of *CSI*.

1.7. Iconicity (Un)Definable

As suggested earlier, defining iconicity is challenging. Attributing it a very general description could lead to understatement, misuses, or misunderstandings. “Iconic” in Pierce’s terms and “iconic” used as a synonym to “famous” have distinctive meanings and are applied in different contexts. Narrowing the definition could, on the other hand, prioritize selected domains and fields of study over others. At the same time, iconicity has permeated global societies and cultures in a way that we subconsciously have learned to notice existing and designate brand new icons. Solaroli recapitulates this in a very powerful way, and I hope the readers will forgive the lengthy quotation. As he explains,

[i]conic images, personages, objects, buildings, brands and events constitute deep-rooted and widely shared reference points, which materially embody, visually crystallize, aesthetically express and symbolically condense experiences and meanings. As such, icons stand out in the public culture, they enter the wide cultural imagery and contribute to the construction of public memory. “Iconic power” thus entails the ability to articulate and intensify cultural meanings, narratives and myths into an aesthetically striking, easily recognizable, emotionally rich and symbolically relevant visual-material entity. (1)

Reading through this, a suggestion lurks in that icons have become an important part of the visual language in today’s society. Icons become as such via a cultural and social process, and

are subject to multiple factors in the creation and disappearance of what is considered iconic by a group of people at a given time and in a particular context (2). Solaroli further emphasizes that “[a]s powerfully symbolic eye-catchers in a late-modern, increasingly digital age of distracted attention, icons can bring into focus collectively, yet often unconsciously, shared emotions and meanings, condensing, intensifying, and circulating them in concrete visual-material forms” (2). In other words, visual icons may serve as symbols, literal shortcuts, to convey particular values, sentiments, or memories in little time and at a greater scale. We already observed earlier that these shortcuts are used in branding and marketing for more effect.

Today’s society has been turning toward a visually-focused world perhaps at a faster pace than ever. Most audiences and culture consumers may not consciously apply the term “icon” to signify the unique combinations of meanings it entails, or they may pass by it as simply synonymous with a famous person or object. Businesspeople, media executives, art and content creators and the like dispose of the power of iconicity (via discursive and visual-material means) to offer particular meanings and values and to awake specific feelings in audiences. In this way, they would operate a cultural, economic, political or social agendas which could come to light only when the processes of iconicity are acknowledged, analyzed, and dissected at both explicit and implicit levels. Yet, iconicity is a very broad and complex notion. Solaroli traces the first definitions of an icon and their evolution, addresses multiple existing descriptions to expose their inconsistencies and vagueness, and lastly proposes a multimodal framework to tackle the concepts of iconicity, icons, and their power due to the polysemy they involve, including “[t]heir aesthetic eloquence and semiotic features, their sensory and emotional appeal, their social traction, and particularly their constitutively meaningful associability with latent yet powerful narratives” (22). “Icons,” he adds, “become powerful cultural resources that might be re-mobilized in the future for social action, memory-building, and cultural critique” (22).

Introducing a symposium on iconicity, Solaroli does not provide one finite definition of it. Instead, the researcher offers a multidisciplinary approach as he maps the field and explains existing theories, striving to demonstrate “that the category of iconicity can provide fertile ground for exploring connections and constructing dialogues among different strands in the social sciences and humanities that have so far developed almost independently of each other” (3). He indeed highlights three theories by Alexander (writing on iconicity in terms of surface/depth, material/symbolic considerations), Hariman and Lucaites (analyzing iconic

photographs), and Kurasawa (offering a framework with four concepts of “semiotic structure,” “iconographic repertoire of conventions,” “circulatory network,” and “iconological field”) which he deems promising, and suggests two additional, under-studied standpoints that could further the investigation on iconicity (23-25). Discussing strengths and weaknesses of these positions, the writer points out the multi-faceted investigation that would allow for a thorough and more encompassing understanding across the humanities field. As he writes,

iconic power represents the unpredictable outcome of a complex and dynamic cultural process which depends on “intrinsic” qualities and “agentic” capacities *as much as* on the constitutive relation *with* the icon, articulated through *micro-level social, material and even ritual practices of visual encounter and sensory interaction, meso-level institutional and organizational field dynamics and framing wars, and wider, macro-level narrative performance (and counter-performance)*. In other words, it is important to be cautious in attributing too much autonomous “vitality” to cultural icons, and it is necessary to develop further refined analytical distinctions, addressing the multiple and variable relations among the different factors involved in the process, and identifying the crucial vectors of influence surrounding and shaping the possible configurations of such relations. (23; own emphasis)

The above mapping and sections have hopefully shown how complex, elusive, and powerful iconicity is. If icons can be bearers of meanings, values, attitudes, and emotions, it is paramount to understand the process of their creation, application, social and cultural reception, and motivations and forces driving them to have a more complete picture of the phenomena around us. However, my main purpose in this dissertation only brushes the surface of the widely-spanning iconicity notion. As my dissertation singles out the intersection of television studies (ranging from the specificity of the medium itself to the creation and production practices, to technology and history) with audience studies (reception and dissonance), media studies (representation, mediated reality), and urban studies (city landmarks’ televisual representation), my goal is not to propose a unique and ground-breaking definition of iconicity. I attempt to unveil how television contributes to the general discourse around cities and their iconicity, with a special focus on aerial shots and extreme long shots, inclusive of A- and B- roll footage. I trust that despite the narrow scope of this dissertation the power and implications of iconicity mediated through television will be hereby divulged.

The recognition of the research presented above and the aim of my thesis demand I provide how I understand iconicity. The sections of the following chapter will return to parts of my definition in order to make connections between iconicity and television's technology, its industry practices, audiences, and lastly content. Thus, I would consider an icon to be:

- a. produced by a social and cultural process, even if in some instances it might seem intuitive and subconscious;
- b. ephemeral and dependant on the society's and/or culture's interests in a given context (geographical, cultural, political, economic, and historical);
- c. dependant on repetition and reproduction across time and media;
- d. polysemic, with convergent or divergent meanings across social and cultural groups, simultaneously or asynchronously;
- e. subject to aesthetic and critical acclaim, including both professional discussions and informal, personal opinions;
- f. an outcome of an organic process developed through time and repetition or a result of carefully-designed marketing campaigns and promotion discourses;
- g. considered unique and recognizable in multiple groups and discourses;
- h. referenced in multiple media (press, film, social media *etc.*);
- i. employed in particular discourses (e.g. television series) to symbolically and/or metonymically convey meanings.

Certainly, this definition is very broad but I hope it will support my analysis of the iconicity of cities on television. In other words, the aim is directed towards the medium's ways and practices that contribute to the power of iconicity of cities. It does not intend to investigate and confirm or disprove the iconic status of recognizable locations like the Empire State Building, the Las Vegas Strip, or the Hollywood sign. Furthermore, I treat television series as a carrier, a medium, an economic and cultural means that supports the process of iconicity and, thus, I will not approach the case studies as icons in themselves, despite the iconic status of the critically-acclaimed *The Wire*, nor prove or negate the iconic status of Las Vegas and Baltimore.

Having in mind this layered and multi-focal perspective on analyzing icons, which includes the forces behind the creation of icons and their reception, let us proceed to the next chapter dedicated to the television medium and industry.

II. Iconicity and (Tele)Visual Spectacle

It would be hard to refute the fact that cinema and television have explored the city across multiple productions, both as backdrop and as the main protagonist, in realistic as well as futuristic and imaginative settings, from an amiable or a negative and scrutinizing angle. I would even risk a statement and say that New York City is the most represented and discussed American city in film and television. Finding research articles and books on the Big Apple on screen does not bring any difficulties. Cities like Los Angeles or Chicago are the pretenders for the following places on the podium, with other cities following suit.

The exposure the location can receive in a well-received television series might work as a powerful advertisement that could draw tourists. As already mentioned, it could be part of the place branding and marketing, and publicity campaigns employed by owners of famous architecture structures. Yet, from the television industry perspective, unless commissioned specifically by the city representatives, the interests of the creators is to promote a story about characters that would be popular and bring profit, not to promote or present inquisitive analysis about the backdrop location—at least not in the vast majority of the cases. Regardless of the motivation, however, once recorded on film or a hard drive, the city landscapes become subjected to media repetition. Consequently, their images may travel through various media and be viewed by different audiences, very often asynchronously. These last two points alone refer back to a few markers listed in my definition of an icon. Yet, television is more than reach in numbers and recurrence in time.

There are multiple stages of creation and production that a particular series goes through before it appears on the small screen, from smart TVs to smartphones, from broadcast channels to streaming platforms. There are creative choices and business decisions determining the to-be-told story, appearance of sets, visual effects, structure of scenes, length of the episodes and the series, and their release pattern. Additionally, I later introduce a few creators and producers connected to my two chosen television shows, however, I am mindful to mention that television production is a highly collaborative endeavor. For the conciseness of this project, the analysis levitates around chosen fragments of this complex process, namely: television scheduling and programming, roles of the producer and director, and location choosing and setting. It should suffice to say that not one writer or producer or director is fully responsible for the various phases of the production, yet they might be held accountable if the process is not going well, the

budget goes beyond the quota, or the audiences do not acclaim the series, among other possible tribulations. Considering *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* alone, the drama series has one creator (Anthony E. Zuiker), but 55 episode directors (5 of them directed more than 20 episodes each), and 55 writers (“*CSI: Crime Scene Investigation*” [IMDb]). Spanning 15 years of runtime, *CSI* reflects many creative voices and industry-directed choices over more than one decade; the creator’s (also called a showrunner) role is to maintain the creative vision across the episodes and seasons, and influences from a wealth of contributors partaking in the process. The analysis thus starts at the beginning and considers only the pilot episode—a small percentage of the whole—due to the limitations of this dissertation.

This chapter analyzes how the television series format,¹⁴ episode structure, release pattern, place of distribution, main creators’ experience and approach, and visual means (in the form of bird’s-eye or extreme long shots) can all converge and reinforce—or not—the power of city iconicity in television. In the nowadays highly interactive and internet-based milieu, audiences and reception play an important role in how series are received and consumed, and are one of the factors the writers have to consider. The representation of reality should, in the end, attract spectators (read: potential money-spenders or faithful subscribers) with a coherent, believable story and portrayal of places to be fully enjoyed, even in science-fiction and fantasy. The suspension of disbelief does not start with *Star Trek* (1966-1969) or *Game of Thrones*, but with *Chicago Fire* (2012-) or *Gray’s Anatomy* (2005-), where the shown world is realistic, even if imagined and not real (Eco qtd. in Sadler and Haskins 198-199; Owens 3). Fiske and Hartley remind us that “[t]he metaphoric real world shown on television does not display the actual real world, but displaces it” (32, 136).

Iconicity understood as defined heretofore focuses on city landmarks, *i.e.* recognizable buildings and structures, that are featured (the eternizing factor) in television series (the repetition factor) in establishing shots and sequences to show the passing of time, or location change, but which do not include the characters. Because the city images are associated with the storylines they are set within, they refer to the values and events devolving in the episode or even the whole series. The structures considered iconic have a metonymic power, and their screen representations are carriers of associations even if they do not appear in scenes where characters’

¹⁴ I will try to avoid the use of *genre* in my text, as this concept is becoming more fluid and challenged by newer research due to today’s multiplication and mixing of categories in terms of productions’ finite style and form. See, for example, Jason Mittell’s *Genre and Television* (2004) for more on the topic.

interplay and events involving them happen. Consequently, drawing upon two case studies, I will try to conclude what—formulaically and creatively—could determine the avoidance of such shots as well. As I will present, the *CSI* franchise tells the story of city crime and police officers in a different way than *The Wire*: the obvious difference of plots, locations, and production companies aside, they approach cities in distinct ways, which reflects on city iconicity.

Approaching iconicity from the television industry's production side is not a straightforward deed. In the end, the television series or program needs to be successful, financially as much as (or perhaps more importantly than) artistically and critically: be seen or rented by a minimum number of viewers, preferably also with good reviews and ratings from the critics and the audiences. There are many variables in the process, beginning at the very idea of the pitch and the studio's decision to proceed with the development talks, and ending at negative reception by the audiences or low viewer numbers, which would lead to the show's cancellation. As highly capitalist as the mainstream entertainment industry is, it is difficult to conjure more significant reasons for the production companies to proceed with a series if not for making profits out of it. Thus, the iconicity of a place clearly cannot be their purpose on its own. Yet, the iconic power or renown might be an underlying factor in the decision-making and development processes that the creators will want to include some iconic locations in their series or not. Let us investigate the creation and production processes in more detail first.

2.1. Television History and Technologies

Notwithstanding the narrow choice of contemporary television crime drama series from the early 2000s until today, I need to make a necessary, but brief, recourse to television development in the twentieth century as it should help us understand its legacy when examining the episodes of *CSI* and *The Wire*. The beginnings of television start at the workshops of radio inventors and broadcast companies. Having access to the equipment and their individual interests at hand, early television pioneers like John Logie Baird and Philo T. Farnsworth managed to transfer the image on air as early as in the 1920s. What they were missing was financial means, which radio networks could provide—if convinced to support the new technology (“1. Pioneers of Television”). CBS, the original network of *CSI*, was first a radio broadcasting network established in the late 1920s before it embraced the new televisual medium.

Historically and equipment-wise, television was much less mobile than today. Over the decades since the 1930s, the sets were bulky, heavy, included small screens (around 10 to 14 inches), and needed to be connected by wire, or—in specific instances—watched along with listening to the radio audition.¹⁵ With the budding industry around the middle of the century, programming was scarce, although the technological developments allowed for a growing number of television equipment being sold. As one could not simply turn the television on and browse through the channels, programming guides started to be distributed in order for the audiences to know when to tune in for a newscast or another broadcast.

With the social movement of those better-off to the suburbs and social campaigns of the government promoting family and religious values, including the vision of a nuclear family in the suburbs, the 1940s and 1950s saw the growth of television along with the crystallization of the advertising system in the industry (Butler 183). For the system to work, audiences including potential buyers were needed; to attract those viewers, specific and targeted content was required. Television manufacturers and content producers designed promoting campaigns based on two main ideas: “the increasing availability of free, advertiser-supported broadcasting, and the image that manufacturers promoted of the television set as a dependable, easily operated, household appliance that would enhance family and social life” (“9. New Mass Medium”). Dunne captures a more pessimistic vision, even if realistic, that “[t]he American television network’s job is not to provide programming, it is to provide advertising. Dramas are just a way to capture the viewer’s attention long enough to sell him something. Drama is a sales tool” (103).

With further growth and the search of opportunities in terms of niche genres and audiences, television benefited from the advancements in the area of cable television—threading its own path separately from the radio—which allowed for a more stable transfer of picture and sound especially in areas where the over-the-air broadcast was perturbed by weather, terrain, or distances. As the audiences expanded and demand was growing, opportunities for new channels and broadcast companies appeared. Beside more coverage on the pressing matters regarding the wars and conflicts (the Vietnam War, the Cold War), social movements (feminist movements,

¹⁵ Museum of Television in Toronto, Canada, which I had an opportunity to visit in April 2023, offers a unique opportunity to see (yet not touch) some of the oldest or rarest television sets produced. Seeing them in person allows for a perspective on how bulky they are in terms of the space they take, their mobility and functionality, when compared to the size of the screen itself and quality it achieved. Assuredly, LG, Samsung and other RTV manufacturers have built and sold smart TVs of sizes at 86 and 97 inches respectively, yet their quality and functionality is without comparison to the equipment constructed in the 1920s and 1930s.

sexual movements) in the United States, television became a source of entertainment for thousands of households, providing comedies, drama series, and sports coverages.

Available programs and series on the offer saturated the medium, and the executives (as well as businesspeople) propelled new solutions that eventually would shape television further. For one, channels and networks needed to distinguish their brands from the competitors. As a result, some turned to producing specific types of content and to niches in the industry, called narrowcasting, like Music Television (MTV for short)(Butler 185; Mittell 20). Others began to apply a unique and differentiated visual style that would stand out in the field of similar productions (Dunne 105-109 on the problem of trends and similarities in the television industry; Butler 246 and 427 on how style helps with product differentiation). Second, with the increasing number of viewers and new generations of spectators, broadcast networks were challenged to fight for the viewers. One of the possibilities to gain more viewership was to create content of better quality,¹⁶ a notion of differentiation applied ever since the 1950s¹⁷ (Thompson xvii; Bianculli 36; Dunne 106; Feuer 146). At the same time, new opportunities to the television industry spurred and saw the growth of paid cable television, which allowed for precursors of HBO or Showtime to emerge. HBO as a paid-cable service launched in 1972 and provided encoded content to those viewers who paid additional fees.

As popularity and technology came to par with each other to demand and offer more and better quality content, 1990s saw two important factors for the evolution of television: digital television in terms of telecommunication technical improvements; and what would later be called quality television¹⁸ (or rather, it's another wave associated with bold and taboo-breaking productions from HBO)—a specific kind of television programs that presented “quality” writing, narrative, and visual styles. Although both analog and digital television can be distributed over

¹⁶ One could argue that the broadcast and production companies could rely on improving the marketing strategies even though their content would not better considerably. The risk to this would be that the viewers could easily switch the channel to a different one offering better-quality programs.

¹⁷ Jane Feuer traces back the trends and television programs that have been classified as “quality television” in her chapter “HBO and the Concept of Quality TV.” She writes that “the idea of ‘quality drama’ existed in the form of the live ‘anthology’ teleplays of the 1950s. Written by New York playwrights, appealing to an élite audience and financed by individual corporate sponsors as prestige productions, these live TV dramas carried the cachet of the ‘legitimate’ theatre... On the one hand, they defined themselves as quality because they exploited an essential characteristic of their medium: the ability of television to broadcast live in a way films could not. On the other hand, their prestige came from an association with a ‘higher’ form of art: theatre, a form that at this time was widely acknowledged by intellectuals as superior to the film medium as well” (146).

¹⁸ There have been several time periods in the evolution of television that could be described as “quality television.” For this project, I will consider the definition referring to the content created by HBO since the 1990s, as the case studies do not date earlier than 2000.

the air or via cable, by using digital signals, the latter offers higher resolutions and bigger bandwidth when transferring data, which results in better quality of the image and sound received. Additionally, as Butler explains, “[o]ver-the-air broadcast signals, cable wires, and satellite transmissions...can send only one message—or show—at a time, a technological limitation that led to television being organized by a schedule. Networks, channels, and stations were needed to organize that schedule” (37). The shift to digitally-distributed communication enabled “using Internet protocols because this technology enables viewer selection rather than a set schedule of programming,” he adds (37). As with previous inventions, new achievements and possibilities in the telecommunication field emerged. Image resolutions of 720p, 1080p, 4K and higher have been developed since the late 2000s and each new wave has been deemed “high definition” (or “HDTV”) as it provides higher resolutions than the predecessors.

In terms of quality television, the term does not involve the technical aspects of the medium but the aspects of the content itself. I develop this concept in the succeeding subchapter dedicated to networks, cable and quality television, and focused on the interrelation of their distribution formats, financial support, and content itself. The emergence and the importance of Netflix as a streaming service for the entertainment industry, other platforms following in its footsteps seems to show that it is the next, natural step in the television evolution, begun by HBO and its predecessors a few decades earlier. The ever-increasing bandwidths and access to Internet providers helped to move television to an omnipresent level, where television shows can be viewed asynchronously, on-demand, at any place, and almost on any device, including smartphones, computer screens, smart TVs, and iPads.

As of yet, the link between city iconicity might not be evident, yet it hopefully becomes as such when one considers the quality of the image and screens themselves, and challenges to showing a better picture when upgrades do not necessarily mean a lack of implications to the series themselves. For the iconicity of locations, how the place or a building is received will to an extent depend on the condition of the image and the equipment itself. Let us shift toward two examples determined by technological enhancements within the industry, namely the switch of the screen ratio from 4:3 to 16:9 and television screens themselves. Succinctly, if a series was recorded in the older 4:3 aspect, the frame’s upper and lower parts will usually be cut to accommodate the newer television screen format of 16:9, lengthening the image vertically. This results, for instance, in changes to the composition of shots or lost information conveyed on

screen. When it happened to *The Simpsons* (1989-) after the launch of the Disney+ platform in 2020, the show was available in a remastered form of higher image quality, but suffered due to omitted gags and visual information in the cut-out parts. Following the public's outcry, the platform enabled the option to choose the original 4:3 ratio for pre-2009 episodes or the remastered one (Hayes). A similar thing happened to the cartoon earlier in 2014 when FXX network aired the series' marathon (Butler 332-33). This change may not impact the shots when characters' close-ups or location long shots are considered, yet the frames will still be recomposed, minimizing the space around characters, cutting their legs or hair, or even obscuring parts of the surroundings which could give additional clues about the setting. Interestingly, *The Wire* had originally been shot in a wider aspect ratio and some of the frames suffered from too much information around the characters being added after the station aired the series in the 16:9 ratio, where characters were no longer isolated from their backgrounds in the 4:3 format, as planned by showrunner and writer David Simon (Butler 334-5).¹⁹

Tracking the technological developments of television even on a high level²⁰ brings one thing to the forefront: audiences have wanted to watch better quality images and manufacturers have been providing that—and perhaps more. New technologies of color, higher resolutions and more vertical aspect ratios, LED lighting as well as lighter filming and receiving equipment all have enhanced how and where we view television series and programs today. Smaller cameras and drones lower the costs and enable mobility when shooting aerial and high-angle footage (Ip). These changes have consequently and consistently influenced and tested the creation and production processes. As television is, after all, a *visual* medium, television writers, directors, and other creators stand in front of a challenge: what types of cameras, angles, and frames to choose. Not all the frames and shots taken for the smartphone screen will look well on screens of fifty inches, or the reverse. Watching a spectacular panning-out shot of a beach in Miami in *Ballers* (2015-2019) will account for little excitement on a smartphone screen, where a myriad of details will be lost. Conversely, a close-up showing minute details of facial expressions on a character's face on a smartphone may still convey what he or she is feeling, transferring the same frame to a fifty-inch screen will turn the character's head unnaturally big. Jim Owens echoes

¹⁹ Butler provides a thorough explanation on the differences between ratios, their popularity and application in a historicized overview in his *Television: Visual Storytelling and Screen Culture* (328-38).

²⁰ I consciously have omitted information about the important factors played by VCR, DVD, Blu-Rays and further digital developments in media and television due to the limits of this dissertation. Nevertheless, their role and enablement of audiences as more active spectators cannot be denied (Lotz qtd. in Butler 34; Thompson xix).

similar concerns when he discusses types of shots in one of the chapters of *Television Production* (129). Developments, changes, and the following implications thus impact the creative and production choices of which types of frames, shots, angles will be applied, what kinds of camera lenses will record the scenes, and more. From the case studies, *CSI* and *The Wire* come from the time when the 4:3 screen ratio was dominant, however both were recorded in the wider aspect (“*CSI: Crime Scene Investigation*” [shotonwhat.com]).

2.2. Networks, Cable, and Quality Television

Networks and cable companies do not create content for content’s sake or to fulfill artistic visions. They need to bring profits in the form of advertisers in the former case, and subscribers and direct payers in the latter (Feuer 147; Butler 40). This difference in financing models further transpires to the commissioning, scheduling, programming, and production of the programs. Moreover, how these programs and their content are monitored applies differently to them: in the United States, over-the-air network companies need to pay heed to the regulations and restrictions of the Federal Communications Commission (Horan 117; “Consumer Guide. The FCC and Speech”). Cable channels have been free from this policing and consequently could explore and push the boundaries of what can, has been and, potentially, will be viewed on the small screen.

As networks receive their major financing from advertisers, they will need to produce such content and in such ways as to persuade viewers to buy consumer products they have been exposed to. The major American broadcast players since the late 1920s and early 1930s have been CBS, ABC, and NBC, with Fox Television emerging in the 1980s. Their scheduling accommodates commercials between and in-between shows and targets particular consumer groups during the day, while their “commercial, popular culture with least objectionable programming” (Nelson 39) should contain “programs with the aim of finding content that will gather the most advertiser-desired viewers” (Butler 40). Subscribers-dependent cable premium channels like HBO or Showtime are financed from the pockets of “wealthy professionals who are likely to be college educated” (Nelson 46). They “must provide programming of such value that people are willing to pay for it directly. This often leads to different programs and programming strategies than are typical of advertiser-supported television” (Butler 40). Consequently, how programs are scheduled, interrupted (or not), and stylized is the direct effect

of commercial networks' accommodating the time to show the products advertisers paid to be promoted. If iconicity in the context of television depends on the repetition and exposure of the images to spectators, I would suggest that how the medium contributes to the power of icons partially lies in the scheduling and programming.

Drawing from Raymond Williams, Butler explains television's contradictory uniformed structure and its internal segmentation when he writes that

television differs crucially from other art forms in its blending of disparate units of narrative, information, and advertising into a never-ending **flow** of television. Although we often talk of watching a single television program as if it were a separate discrete entity, during the network era we more commonly simply *watched television*. The set was on. Programs, advertisements, and announcements came and went (horizontal axis). Mere fragments of programs, advertisements, and announcements flashed by as we switched channels (vertical axis). (20; original emphasis)

The scholar names this type of television "linear TV." There is no beginning or end of television, it is a "ceaseless flow" fed to the viewers who can only join the train that is the stream of content being broadcast regardless if the audiences watch television at a given time or not (Butler 19; Owens 11). Furthermore, Butler identifies that its "maintenance...dominates nearly every aspect of the structures and systems of network-era television and its descendants. It determines how stories will be told, how advertisements will be constructed, and even how television's visuals will be designed" (20). In other words, all constituent parts of television are interconnected in a way that even if they can be singled out, they are intertwined and impact each other constantly. Part of this singling out is referenced in the three consequences of the flow identified by Butler: polysemy, interruption, and segmentation.

Network television's continuous flow presents and inevitably juxtaposes series and programs that may carry converging as well as contradicting and opposing meanings (25-27). Moreover, "linear television is constantly interrupting itself. Although the flow that gushes from our TV sets is continuously television texts, it is not continuously the same type of texts. There are narrative texts and non-narrative texts and texts of advertising and information" among others. From the audience perspective, "we as viewers often interrupt ourselves while watching television. We leave the viewing area to visit the kitchen or the bathroom. Our attention drifts as we check Snapchat or Twitter or argue with friends and family. We doze" (28). Thirdly, we

usually say that we watch an episode, a sports game, or a newscast. Indeed, the seemingly unbroken “flow of television is segmented into small parcels”: commercial breaks comprise several advertisements of different products, “[n]ews programs [include] news, weather, and sports segments...[g]ame shows play rounds of a fixed, brief duration.” Finally, and most importantly for this dissertation, Butler underlines that “[n]arrative programs must structure their stories so that a segment can fit neatly within the commercial breaks” (30). Indeed, in network television, the time slots usually take one hour, with a small difference around the news, sports, and weather forecast times whose division into separate parts is more profound. *CSI* episodes last roughly forty to forty-five minutes each, the remainder of about twenty minutes belonging to commercials. Butler unapologetically states that “to the television industry, programs are just filler, a necessary inconvenience interrupting the true function of television: broadcasting commercials” (30).

Although part of the linear television, subscriber-financed channels like HBO or Showtime²¹ are free from the advertisement obligation and, as already mentioned, need to persuade their audiences by the kind and quality programming they offer. When it comes to scheduling, when commercials are removed from the flow, the episodes can be longer, are not interrupted—although they would still usually follow the three-act narrative structure—and consequently can develop the story at a slower pace, provide more details or, ideally, introduce complexities and layers to storylines, and provoke audiences to contemplate. In HBO’s example, the runtime of *The Wire*’s episodes ranges between fifty minutes to one hour and a few minutes. The interruption is more likely on the viewers’ side, who need to prepare to sit and watch the episode for a longer time without network-imposed intermissions. Conversely, they do not need to rush from one pause to another that discontinues the episode; instead, they gain more time with the characters, the setting, and the plot.

Even though the term “quality television” escapes a finite definition,²² it is worth introducing the term at this moment. Not to argue that one branch of television brings more quality content than another—as such considered content can be evaluated and found in both,

²¹ Although they play an important role today, I exclude their respective streaming platforms from this comparison since they have introduced a new branch in the televisual media since the arrival of Netflix, which merits its own analysis in more depth.

²² The challenge of delimiting what “quality television” means, what it applies to, and according to what area of study, is broadly introduced and presented across multiple perspectives in McCabe, Janet and Kim Akass, editors. *Quality TV: Contemporary American Television and Beyond*. I.B.Tauris, 2007.

given if some criteria are established—but more to quote Dunne on the relationship between commercials and critical thinking. Namely, “[t]hinking audiences are harder to sell to; lulled viewers are more easily reached and persuaded,” says the researcher and observes that “[q]uality’ programming, in the sense of thoughtful and thought-provoking dramatic material, inhibits commercial message reception. Thought-provoking drama can suppress emotion [and] sad or contemplative viewers are not as easily influenced by commercials as happy viewers” (110). Having the ability to scrutinize the content they watch, mindful and informed spectators may decide that they no longer like a program because of its quality or style, or—to the fears of broadcasting networks—dissect commercials and disregard them altogether. My starting point when introducing the concept of scheduling, programming and quality television (understood as thought-provoking high-cost drama productions) is to marry their respective consequences to how they can contribute to the process of creation and maintenance of the iconic status in regards to cities. Let us return to scheduling first.

If viewers are distracted by commercial breaks, they in turn need to be informed when the advertisement time is over and the subsequent part of the episode begins. Although each segment does not have its own opening sequence, like full episodes most often have, they tend to include establishing shots or longer introductory sequences during which the viewers have time to transition back to the televisual reality, especially when they have left their seats to go to the kitchen. From the narrative perspective, the writers would not want to include important information in these transition periods. Should viewers miss it, their understanding of the ensuing events could be disturbed. Consequently, I would argue that there is a need for a “filler” that would serve as a bridge. One of the possibilities for such transitions is to use aerial imagery and landscape shots of the locations where the story is set. This has a consequence for iconicity as it reproduces images of locations that do not add crucial information to the narrative, will inevitably be associated with that narrative, and reproduce the images of the sites and cities for (seemingly) their own sake.

Premium channels, on the other hand, do not need to accommodate the transition periods because their episodes are stripped from commercial interruptions—although they might apply establishing shots and the like to adjust the pace between the scenes. Unless city-focused imagery was part of the selected style for a production, it might become distracting to the main plot in some cases. Instead, a good narrative and “quality” television, in Dunne’s sense, would

utilize the maximum time possible to convey information and meanings that could propel thinking and debate. Consequently, the writers may inscribe shots focused on details like objects, pieces of clothing, footprints, and other clues that would invite the audiences to pay close attention. If the use of extreme long shots of cities is limited in productions on subscriber channels, they could bring additional meanings to the story when introduced, for example, at a crucial moment in the life of one of the characters. As a result, this emphasis not on the frequency of appearance but on the accentuated arrival to the foreground may contribute to the factor of uniqueness in terms of iconicity, as well as the context around the narrative and the meanings it is able to produce.

One could argue that these two examples prove that television in general contributes to the iconicity of places and further research is not needed. From my perspective, *how* they do that is crucial to understanding both television and iconicity. Another constituent part of this process is the fact that behind the umbrella term of “broadcast companies,” “cable television” and so on stand people that plan, design, and make the content we select and watch. Despite being a highly collaborative medium dependent on the business profiles of the telecommunication companies and the engagement of the audiences, individual creators, producers, writers, or directors are elevated by industry workers or viewers in recognition of their production’s success. For the conciseness of this dissertation, a broader historical and industry-focused approach is not possible when it comes to the individuals I would like to introduce next. Thus, only short presentations of Anthony E. Zuiker, Jerry Bruckheimer, David Simon and Ed Burns will follow and focus mostly on their involvement, motivations behind, and decisions around *CSI* and *The Wire*. Their choices and approaches have influenced the location, style, and other details of their series, and I plan to uncover more details about how this has transpired into the iconicity of the city.

2.3. *Creating and Producing Television (and Iconicity)*

Approaching the analysis first from the production side of the television industry may seem counterintuitive. Research books like *Television Production* by Gray and Lotz, for instance, begin the considerations of the textual approaches, followed by audience studies which have increasingly accepted viewers’ agency in creating meaning, and only considered the so-called “industrial studies of television” as the tertiary and the youngest strain of television studies,

which have been assuming more concrete form since the beginning of this century (ch.4). Their book, however, traces the developments of social, cultural, and finally emerging television studies chronologically. By writing about the production before introducing the audience's points of view, I adopt the approach to begin with the idea—the actual birth—of a series, the creative and production stages that impact city iconicity, including the challenges the executives face, and leave the audience to the last place. Utopically, this order would follow “the life of a television series.” Realistically, the producers also belong to the audience realm and are thus influenced by other content, but that consideration falls outside of this dissertation's range.

The opening and closing credits contain several names, yet only some of them will be rendered prominent in the opening and, or both, closing credits, and mentioned with a certain level of recognition (or criticism) in the press, junkets, promotional materials and so on. The people behind these names will be recognized by more television viewers, popular culture-informed audiences, fans, journalists, and fellow industry workers. This applies both to cinema and television, but in the latter case, it is more about the showrunners and producers that there is more buzz about in the media as opposed to film directors. There are tens of roles and functions for each series that these names belong to but, in this subchapter, I am forced to narrow the focus to creators/showrunners, producers, and writers in an attempt to link their roles and how the show they collaboratively create²³—with many other functionaries from lighting, set design, photography, costume, whose work inevitably cannot be mentioned here and has less involvement in city choices *per se*—may consequently reinforce the iconicity of the city the series is set in. In order to do that, I first outline the responsibilities of these three main functions in the development process. It has been pointed out that personal choices, views, motivations, and opinions are an under-studied area in the research about television (Davies 172). As limited as this project unfortunately is, a part of this subchapter and later case studies will try to delve into the matter: what sparked the creators like Simon, Zuiker, or Bruckheimer,²⁴ to work on their series and what roles, if any, their respective cities played in the process, starting from pitching

²³ Davies has been researching the notion of authorship and ownership in the television industry and uses the example of *Star Trek* in “Quality and Creativity in TV. The Work of Television Storytellers” to present the challenges, contradictions, and industry-informed notes and interviews with a few writers of the science-fiction series (171-84).

²⁴ Acknowledging the television's collaborative efforts and recognizing the existing and ongoing debate on the authorship and ownership of content produced for and shown on television, I am unable to develop this notion further in the pages of this dissertation. The choices of Simon and Bruckheimer have been based on the discourses they appear in when it comes to the series analyzed by me as well as by limitations of this project that required examples of industry people, whose contributions could be described theoretically and in the case studies.

the idea itself. Focusing on the city choice, I have chosen only a small piece of the expansive scope of television production. Nevertheless, in this approach, I would like to echo British scholar Máire Messenger Davies when she writes that “their [producers’, creators’ *etc.*] personal accounts of how they worked...have a value for us as scholars. Not only are they witnesses to the historical conditions of production at the time they were working, but these accounts also give revealing insights into how to read the texts, the stories we see on screen” (173-74). What influences and constraints the creative teams are exposed to and how this further reflects on particular solutions applied should receive more prominence in research to make the scholars more informed of new theories, perspectives, and paths, as well as to reveal to various audiences the aspects of the development and production operations that could, discursively, change how the viewers perceive the finalized products which they consume on television.

First is the showrunner. It is the main person who supervises the different parts of the process from the beginning and is “responsible for the ongoing production of a program” (Butler 421). One of the writers of the show, they may be its (co-)creators and, usually, one of the producers (“Showrunner”). Showrunners literally “run the show” to maintain its consistency in style and over time, developing the pitched idea accordingly, and managing and administering the consecutive stages and various teams involved in the process.

The self-explanatory name of a creator refers to a person who has conjured up an original idea, prepared a convincing presentation, and successfully sold their series pitch to a network that has greenlit the production of the pilot episode (Butler 247). The idea could have also come from a person already affiliated with a studio or a network, for instance, from a producer. Owens explains in detail the television production process: “[t]he producer and director often act as coaches, reviewing the work by each segment of their staff, encouraging, giving feedback, providing quality control, and challenging them to move forward at a brisk pace. The producer or the director has to juggle all of these aspects at the same time” (59). However, contrary to the cinema practices where the director can be responsible for the final version of the film in a producer’s stead,²⁵ it is the showrunner, supported by the fellow executive producers, who has the final say of what goes in and what goes out. The number of producers for a show depends on

²⁵ Unless the communication between the producers and the director is less than cooperative, the studio can decide to release a theatrical cut, which is different from the director’s vision, like in the case of the recent *Justice League* film whose directorial Snyder Cut was released on HBO Max in 2021.

their professional expertise, the grandeur of the show, and budgetary and other available resources.

Horace Newcomb and Paul M. Hirsch write that “[t]he goal of every producer is to create the difference that makes a difference, to maintain an audience with sufficient reference to the known and recognized, but to move ahead into something that distinguishes his [sic] shows for the program buyer, the scheduler, and most importantly, for the mass audience.” They continue,²⁶ the goal of many producers, the most successful and powerful ones, is also to include personal ideas in their work, to use television as all artists use their media, as means of personal expression. Given this [sic] goals it is possible to examine the work of individual producers as other units of analysis and to compare the work of different producers as expressions within the forum.” (568)

Because of how much executive power they have and the fact that they are part of the writing team, their vision will most likely be the one permeating the production, its style, development arc, and so on.

However, on a more realistic level—or rather the capitalist one—the producers need to develop a television show that will sell (audiences to advertisers) or be a selling point (of products and places of a series, as well as a streaming platform or a channel to consumers). To be able to sell a series, it needs to have a story and enough ideas to be told over several months of the season.²⁷ McCabe and Akass emphasize the same when they quote David Liddiment, creative director of All3 Media. Although they need to maintain consistency of a series, “[s]implify to survive producers now have to create and realise ideas that sell...Capturing the public imagination with innovative programmes that serve purposes other than delivering commercial impacts or increasing share is not necessarily at the top of their agenda” (6).

Moreover, researching the *Star Trek* franchise and the television industry around it, Davies has led and analyzed multiple interviews with its producers. Their work would account for nothing if it were not for the writers who come up with, scavenge, or recycle ideas, and

²⁶ Although Horace and Newcomb refer to Newcomb and Robert Alley’s book *The Television Producer as Artist in American Commercial Television*, I did not find their work available in online or offline sources.

²⁷ Today, besides broadcast networks’ scheduling of seasons, we need to consider weekly episodes released on streaming and cable by companies like HBO as well as streaming-exclusive recurrent premieres on Amazon Prime Video and, finally, the releases of full seasons on the same day on Netflix. Interestingly, the latter is not a rule fixed in stone: there have been series released on the streaming giant’s platform whose episodes were released one by one or in batches, e.g. *Outlander* (2014-), *Riverdale* (2017-2023), *Arcane* (2021-), based on the League of Legends video game), the fourth season of *Stranger Things* (2016-), or the third season of *The Witcher* (2023).

consequently form episode scripts and longer story arcs based on them or someone else's pitches. Davies emphasizes the importance of writers when referring to Rick Berman, whose "biggest problem as the executive producer [of *Star Trek*] with overall responsibility for 'everything' was finding writers; this was the one currency, or source of value, that the production could not afford to be without" (177). Indeed, the writers need to work with many ideas on a weekly basis, write scripts in a fast-paced way not to block or delay the production and filming, and be ready to introduce any changes to their texts as some words may seem well-written on paper, but may not work when said out loud by an actor or a writer preparing to shoot a scene (Mason).

Thus, the writer—usually a band of them—is the most crucial element of creating television. Without a story, dialogues, and stakes for the characters, there is no reason for the existence of set designs, special effects, location choices and the like on their own. As David Simon has told Wyatt Mason, who interviewed the creator in 2010, "[i]f the material itself proves to be ordinary and ineffectual at conveying what we want to convey, I don't care how you shoot it. I don't want to watch it, and I don't want to be a part of it. Either we have something to say or we don't" (Mason). If the writing is good, has an engaging story and dialogues, and relatable stakes, it has higher chances of receiving audiences' praise for its quality and value. At this point, however, we are entering the risky sphere of personal taste and critique, deciding whether the writing of a series is good or bad, engaging for us or boring, promising or ill-structured and misleading. Although the viewers' responses may be oppositional to the esteemed positive esteem of the script writing, this does not negate the existing medium-specific conventions, industry-established requirements for television scripts or genre-related rules.

Gray and Lotz observe that the industrial branch of television studies has developed only recently due to "the challenges of access to industry workers and their workplaces, limited examples of this research (especially in television entertainment), and uncertainty regarding how to conceptualize such research amidst feuding critical intellectual traditions" (ch.4). On the edge of sounding apocalyptic for the networks in terms of vanishing audiences, Gray and Lotz note that "[g]one are the days when a network could expect a third of the viewing audience to watch any given program, and, instead, the new television economy requires broadcasters to woo their fans with multiple technologies, platforms, and extra material" (ch.3). Thanks to the high

competition for the “viewers’ eyeballs”²⁸ and technological developments involving high-speed internet, the rise of streaming, and narrowing of niches, some production companies, networks, and cable channels alike have had recourse to different forms of ancillary materials related to their shows. As a result, both audiences and viewers are allowed more access to the industry even though some of the behind-the-scenes are guarded by the industry’s or a single production’s producers-gatekeepers, who present what and how they want. Nevertheless, it does provide more than minimum insights as before.

HBO, for example, has launched official podcasts dedicated to *Chernobyl* (2019), *The Last of Us* (2023-), and *Succession* (2018-2023), where the show’s very own creators, producers, writers, actors, and other industry workers appear to talk about their experiences while working on the set or behind the scenes, the emotions they felt, the choices they had to make, and what working with some directors or writers looked like, and more. Compared to the industry’s situation from a few decades ago, it was more cumbersome—for both television people and journalists alike—to interview a producer or an actor, as Davies did. Launching such podcasts, HBO businesspeople may have wanted to add another channel to promote their series. For the audiences and fans, and researchers, such materials are a glimpse behind the episodes, on developing ideas, justifying choices, and presenting what could have worked or could not. Amazon Prime executives had a similar idea when they asked *The Expanse*’s (the book²⁹) writer Ty Franck and the actor portraying Amos, Wes Chatham, to host a podcast about the science-fiction series under the same title. By their multiple stories from the set and the production process (especially considering Franck’s limited experience in television production prior to the deal with Syfy and then Amazon), we as viewers and listeners receive insights on the crew, the process, and the role of executive producer Naren Shankar without interviews being led, and with more personal touches. Yet, how does all the above, especially the roles of the showrunner, creators, producers and writers, reflect on city iconicity?

The question of the story setting is one of the first ones the creators need to answer when developing the idea and drafting the narrative. Unless it is an experimental production, characters cannot live in a vacuum—they will fight their struggles in a room or a cell, in a shopping mall or a school, in the suburbs or a city neighborhood, and finally the whole city, whose parts will be

²⁸ Paraphrasing the title of the book by Gina Keating *Netflixed: The Epic Battle for America's Eyeballs* published in 2012.

²⁹ *Leviathan Wakes* by James S.A. Corey.

shown or referenced across multiple episodes. For some stories, the choice of location simply needs to make sense. Although originally created in the form of comic strips and developed recently more in cinema than on the small screen, Spiderman's universe serves as a perfect example: without skyscrapers, roofs, cranes, or bridges, the web-spinning superhero would abide less spectacularly if set in a small town in the Midwest. He would not be spectacular. In television, *Euphoria* (2019-) is a nerve-wracking controversial phenomenon revealing the trials and tribulations of a group of high school students, dealing with abuse, drug addiction, depression, sex, and alcohol. It is located in fictional East Highland which can reveal its real setting by way of the architecture and urban design where the episodes were filmed, and particularly for some viewers who have been to these places in person, or live in the vicinity, and are able to recognize them. By not anchoring such a narrative in a real location, the story and the issues exposed on screen seem "universal." If not set in an existing town, these struggles could happen anywhere in America's high school, not particularly in New York City, Los Angeles, or any other place. Another example is *All American* (2018-), whose heavily charged plot depends on the tensions between two neighborhoods in Los Angeles: Crenshaw and Beverly Hills. The choice of the storyline for the protagonist is the main driving force behind choosing the locations. For each group, multiple examples could be found. Deciding if the more grave the topic, the higher tendency to set the story in a fictional place merits a separate research project, thus I will not make a statement in this regard.

The choice of how much the camera and the story should focus on the characters and their surroundings depend on the motivations behind the narrative (What is it exactly that the story is supposed to tell us?), the production budget limits, technological and equipment constraints (in the past, the cameras' size allowed for less mobility than today). In the early development stage, the executives have also to decide whether on-location shooting will be best, or if the production should take place in a studio, either choice having its advantages and disadvantages.

If the decision is to shoot on location, the development will involve location scouting, a step in which the crew look for and work on obtaining necessary permissions to film in a given location, from private owners or public institutions. The choice of the site will impact production costs (transportation costs, catering, equipment, extras) but, on the other hand, it cannot be any location: characters are anchored in a(n) city) environment, which will impact their actions,

choices, and stories to a more considerable or lesser degree. Furthermore, the set design, camera angles and frames, visual style, establishing shots, and the structure and timing of the series depend on the genre, format, channel (and platform), and its scheduling, described in the previous section. In turn, all these pieces and creative decisions will culminate in the end product seen on television, presenting the city in a negative or positive, personal or ambivalent, analytical or distanced perspective. Even though the final decoding will depend on the viewer, the audience “works with” the series done by many, some of whom have added their imprint on the city representation (not to mention the events, characters, visual style and the rest).

2.4. Location Selection and Location Scouting

“The ‘Pittsburghness’ of Pittsburgh wasn’t necessarily important...It was just harder to manufacture Pittsburgh in that place,” says Craig Mazin, one of the creators, executive producers, and writers of *The Last of Us* in the fourth episode of HBO’s official podcast about the show (“Episode 4 - ‘Please Hold To My Hand’” 00:11:14-36). The series is an adaptation of a video game in which the protagonists Ellie (Bella Ramsey) and Joel (Pedro Pascal) begin a journey through a post-apocalyptic North America to transport Ellie to a designated location and to find Joel’s brother. They begin their journey in Boston, Massachusetts, and at some point in the story need to travel through Pittsburgh in Pennsylvania. In the series’ fourth installment, however, Kansas City, Missouri, substitutes Steel City. Mazin explains that this replacement “was just one of those things that I refer to as a superficial change. ‘Cause what city you’re in is not important. What happens to the characters and the choices they make in that city, that’s what’s really important” (00:12:00-15). This statement risks unsettling the reasoning introduced earlier that the choice of locations is necessary and should be considered because the story needs to happen in a spatial context, with an environment that influences the characters.

Indeed, Troy Baker, the podcast’s host and Joel’s voice actor from the game, adds, “the thing that I liked about it being Kansas City is, it made it believable that they would open up and they would talk to each other. It made it believable that they were more comfortable” (00:12:20-30). Interestingly, he does not clarify if they were comfortable because of the city setting itself—to note: the world is in the post-apocalyptic state because of a fungi-caused pandemic—or if they are simply comfortable talking to each other after the time spent on the road. If we consider the geographic placement of Pittsburgh and Kansas City, the latter lies farther

away from Boston. *Ergo*, Joel and Ellie would spend more time on the road together. *Ergo*, their relationship, although perturbed by a loss and distrustful at the beginning, could become more “comfortable” when they arrive in Kansas City. Even though Mazin claims that the setting change is superficial, it does contribute to the narrative nonetheless and, instead of being trivial, can add meaning if examined closely.

This example of Pittsburgh’s being changed to Kansas City may not be as dramatic as if the *Sex in the City*’s (1998-2004) New York City had been switched to Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, or Denver, Colorado, or any other bigger but not as mediatized American city. Yet, it proves that the choice of locations matters, even if the producers themselves do not consider it as of much importance. Interestingly, the Kansas City setting the HBO producers want to make the viewers believe is actually one of the sets available for the production in Calgary and near Edmonton, both in Alberta, Canada. As the producers explain, their final choice of Kansas City was because the sets they already had available for use “looked closer to Kansas City” than to Pittsburgh (00:11:20-30). Consequently, this presents another kind of choice—mainly monetary to reuse the already available sets and cut costs—that the production team needs to make, even if it results in adjusting the plot.

Furthermore, because Kansas City does not dispose of widely recognizable landmarks that could steal away the audience’s attention in aerial shots, the story could concentrate on the characters and their relationship, not *where* they were. The same can be observed in another HBO’s recent flagship series, *Euphoria*, where city iconicity is avoided and not needed to emphasize the social issues, (lost) values, and meanings. Indeed, the blocked highway which Ellie and Joel need to cross on *The Last of Us* or the high school microcosm in *Euphoria* become universal. On the other hand, there are television shows that are intrinsically tied to their settings, like *Sex and the City*’s New York City, *CSI*’s Las Vegas (and Miami and New York City again), and *The Wire*’s in Baltimore by way of how their respective narratives or visuals, or both, emphasize the importance and impact of the location upon the characters. Changing the location could dramatically change the narrative.

By the above examples, we can list some of the criteria which the executives may consider when selecting and scouting for locations: budgetary (Do we already have access to a set? Do we have to rent or build the set? How much budget will we spend on setting up the crews and shooting on location?), logistic (What parts of the city do we need to show in the story? Can

we adapt or choose a setting to lower the cost? Where are the settings located? What instructions should we give the design and photography crews to build the set?), legal (Do we have all the required permits to shoot on location?) and creative (What importance does the city setting play for the characters? Are their storylines motivated by particular aspects of a city, like high levels of crime in Baltimore or illegal immigrants from Latin America in the towns at the border with Mexico?).

If the story is an adaptation, the city setting is somewhat predetermined by the original source but, as we have seen, it is not permanently fixed, and the creators and producers may decide on a different one. In *The Last of Us*, the change has been mostly motivated by the budget, but other reasons exist as well. The producers of *Moon Knight*, adapted from Marvel comic books, moved the protagonist from New York City to London because, reportedly, there have been too many movies and series from Marvel set in the Big Apple (Pulliam-Moore). American television is saturated with series set there to such an extent that the production team felt compelled to transport the character elsewhere. In this way, choosing a new location other than the metropolis could be a distinctive trait of yet another Marvel television production among other television shows.

A newer than *The Wire* production from under the pen of David Simon, *The Deuce* (2017-2019), includes scenes filmed on location in Manhattan (in Washington Heights and around Times Square) even though its story is set in the 1970s and 1980s. The main point of the story is to show Time Square's infamous dark side and the origins of the pornography business. The late 20th-century rendition of the city required the places to be modified, lest there would be an incongruity between the on-location filming and the intended time period of the events. Given that the narrative is firmly rooted in New York City, the city setting could not have been transplanted to another location. In order to obtain more realism—as in other shows created and written by Simon—the creative team of *The Deuce* avoided building artificial sets and decided to film the scenes on location. However, given logistical, technical, and also historical constraints, they could do that not exactly in the places as represented in the final version of the episodes. As production designer Scott Dougan tells Louis Cheslaw from *Condé Nast Traveler*, when the latter asked about the impossibility of shooting the episodes in Times Square itself:

David Simon and George Pelecanos care so much that it wouldn't have ever made sense for us to make a green screen. That meant we had to find a location that, like the area at

the time, had all commercial real estate on the ground floor and was on a completely flat street that had four lanes of traffic, which is really difficult to find in New York City. We found it on Amsterdam Avenue, at 163rd Street on the border of Harlem and Washington Heights. We use that same strip for both 42nd Street and 8th Avenue, it's one of the secrets of our show! (Cheslaw)

In this case, the producers showed persistence in procuring spaces to adhere to more realism and to shoot on location rather than deciding to build a set. Their decision seems to have been easier due to the multitude of ground-level bars, taverns, and clubs whose façades could be remodeled to recreate the past. What was more important to Cheslaw, was the realistic representation. Indeed, Butler notes that “[l]ocation setting in narrative programs is used, as in news, to heighten television’s sense of verisimilitude, of being ‘true to reality.’ Police and crime programs, for instance, are prone to location shooting to authenticate the realism of the show” (275).

When we consider iconic spaces, recognizable landmarks, and sites like Times Square, the deed to shoot on location appears hardly possible. Times Square, as most locations deemed iconic, is unique with its characteristic billboards, screens, architecture, triangular square, yellow cabs passing by, and hundreds of visiting tourists. Blocking the traffic to pedestrians and vehicles could not only disturb the flow in the city, but cause additional immense costs to the production, that nowadays can easily be avoided by the use of computer technology and digital post-production methods. As a consequence, the shots featuring the nowadays tourist-filled commercial-colorful square at certain points in time in the series can be digitally rendered to imitate the same location from a few decades ago.³⁰ In this sense, the iconicity of the city poses a constraint for the producers, which transpires from the narrative (place and time chosen), logistics (lack of possibilities for on-location shooting in Times Square), creative (change of the setting impacting the narrative), and technological (if used, digitally-modified shots may bring less realism than intended by the producers).

However, one more very important aspect to consider when selecting the city (or any setting in general) is the combination of the city’s iconicity to the audience reception. Nick Escobar, graphic designer and independent film producer, summarizes the role of the iconic

³⁰ In this sort of (re)production of city imagery, the existing vast archive of public, commercial, and private photographs and videos is of crucial importance, because the digital designers and artists can base their own work off of them as opposed to times from before the 19th century represented in less realistic paintings, drawings, sketches and so on.

locations in establishing shots on Adobe’s website by saying that, since these shots can be basic shots in terms of composition and visual style, “[t]he easiest thing to do in Hollywood movies is a helicopter shot of the Golden Gate Bridge. ‘Oh, we’re in San Francisco, I get it.’” Such a shot “establishes where you are, lets you know what’s going on, and can clue you in to the time period, based on the way the city is shot and color graded” (“Establishing Shot”). Accompanied by a certain type of music and time of day—sunset, for instance—the shot can simultaneously establish a romantic, energetic, nostalgic, ominous, or thoughtful mood.

Similar city characteristic elements are not exclusive to establishing shots and can be used throughout the episodes and scenes. Creators, producers, photography directors, and others dispose of footage of city landmarks and characteristic yet mundane objects alike—from recognizable bridges, skyscrapers, city skylines, or architectural elements to bus and cab colors accepted in a specific city—that can be easily and creatively used in a series. As Butler observes, “[n]arrative, like the news, makes extensive use of the preestablished iconography of the real world” (275). Analyzing *Miami Vice*, the scholar evokes its vernacular iconography, and notes that “other police/detective programs that draw upon the iconography of a particular location,” including *CSI: Miami* (2002–12), concluding that “setting—whether constructed or selected—is not iconographically neutral. It always has the potential to contribute meaning to the narrative or the program’s theme” (275). One television series may apply such iconography to transfer or establish particular meanings in more explicit and faster ways, whereas others will try to conceal it and not allow the characters or the plot to be overwhelmed by connotations that the city imagery could otherwise bring from outside the currently watched show. This is applicable both when the change of screen ratio (Chapter 2.1) and the viewer’s in-person or indirect knowledge about the city (Chapter 2.5) are concerned.

Focusing on the extreme long shots like the bird’s-eye view suggested by Escobar not only may have the advantage of quickly evoking certain intended connotations among the spectators. Filming such shots does not require the involvement of the main crew, actors, designers, drivers, and the like. Instead, the main crew’s focus falls on the camera operators and the renting of a helicopter or, more commonly nowadays, a drone. This technological advancement has made shooting such skyline and top-down city shots more economical and spectacular at the same time. Moreover, this process does not require complex scheduling as when booking actors, places, equipment and set crews to meet at the same filming spot. As a

result, in the final product, the audiences receive a collage of images, characters, and places. And they have the power to decode and engage with what they are watching, to discern some of the meanings encoded by the creators, regardless if those meanings are created individually or collaboratively. The viewers' reception is thus one more aspect the producers should contemplate. Before delving into the audiences' involvement in the television industry and iconicity creation, another logistical and legal aspect of selecting city settings has to be mentioned.

Regardless of the shooting on location with the actors or of the secondary crew recording the B-roll footage, which will be inserted in the episodes in post-production, the filming cannot take place without obtaining permission from the city officials. First and foremost, although the national and regional laws may vary from country to country, the authorization is most often required for any commercial filming or photography, including both established production companies and independent photographers working on their own accord. The image of the city, which includes skylines as well as public places and landmarks on the street level, can only be reproduced with permission if for commercial purposes.³¹ In terms of iconicity, this reason would be mostly aligned with what has been discussed in the first chapter. Namely, the officials not only need to know where the city is represented, but also how and if such representation can bring advantages to the city itself, for instance, enhancing tourism, and consequently, bringing more income to local businesses and industries. Expanding this point to the global political and economic contexts, newly conceived television series could bring more exposure to less recognizable locations, especially when platforms like Netflix are concerned, which not only syndicate shows from non-American regions and make them available to expansive markets, but also commission new productions set outside of the United States. Acquiring permissions in those locations will abide by respective laws and requirements, but the opportunity to introduce Asian, African, or Eastern European countries by way of the entertainment industry alongside the American juggernauts may be enticing to their officials still.³²

³¹ Richard Price, one of the writers on *The Wire*, recalls, "They found a street [for Hamsterdam] that they didn't have to set-dress at all. It just looked like Dante's hell. The problem was, right before they started shooting, they realized that you could see, on a rise, the back of a museum. The museum called the city, complaining, and refused to be in a shot, and the city came back and says, 'You can't shoot there.' They looked at each other. What are we going to do? They moved literally fifty yards that way and found the next street, where you couldn't see the museum. It was the exact same thing. I think they lost an hour" (Abrams ch. 6).

³² Although not part of this project, it is interesting to mention one of the paths to further investigate city iconicity, namely if and how American-set productions have included more overseas locations. An interesting trend has been happening for several decades where franchises like James Bond movies, *Mission Impossible*, *Fast and Furious*

Secondly, even though outside of the iconicity's topic, it needs to be mentioned that such permits are required for the safety of the crew, actors, producers, and extras alike. Police, fire department, and medical assistance should be present on site in case of an accident. The choice of location shooting is a crucial decision to make, because the producers will have to procure the public services as part of the production process, which can in turn generate additional costs.

Thirdly, as much as the B-roll footage can be shot by drone and have little to none transgression in the daily operations of the city, on-location shooting of specific scenes involving characters may require, for example, closing off a few roads or emptying a museum from visitors. The set can also be invaded by an unwanted local or the silence perturbed by the next-door music played loud, which may also cost time and money (Bilefsky; Abrams ch.5). Since the iconic locations are visited more, the decision to film a scene at or nearby may cause more infringement upon the "daily" functioning around that space as well as more preparations and effort on the production's side. Regarding local incentives and politics, this process may be facilitated by the city officials as well (Bilefsky). Overall, the authorization to film and reproduce the city images is required regardless of the scope, but the producers decide whether their needs will be rewarded when creative and logistic choices, possibilities, and constraints are considered.

Up to this point, I have mentioned creators and producers as the driving powers of selecting the city and particular sites within it. Mentioning the term "location scouting" requires me to clarify that the position of the location scout exists as a separate role in the television industry. Kathy M. McCurdy's guide *Shoot on Location: The Logistics of Filming on Location, Whatever Your Budget or Experience* is the only book specifically on location scouting and management for cinema that I have managed to find, but I hope to showcase that more scholarly research about individual television professions at the mid-level are worth the effort and analysis to understand better the medium and the industry, a view expressed by Gray and Lotz as well.

Location scouts' role is to understand the scope and kinds of locations included in the series, to explore and scout for places to fulfill the requirements (aesthetic, logistic, budgetary, legal) established by the producers, and work towards acquiring necessary approvals from property owners and obtaining permits to film. Books, documentaries, memoirs, and other industry-insider sources like *All the Pieces Matter* by Jonathan Abrams reveal detailed and

have explored emblematic locations across Europe, the Middle East, and Asia yet maintaining their American-focused point of view on the local cultures, people, politics and so on.

individual accounts on the production process and flow, crew people at its various levels, as well as the filming locations. A compelling behind-the-scenes story of how Baltimore was felt by the cast and the crew of *The Wire*, the book includes their first-person commentaries about what they saw and experienced in the city during the production times, how the settings were selected and prepared for the filming, or even how the sets were immersed in the raw environment. Fredro Starr, who played Bird in *The Wire*'s first season, reminisces that “[i]t was an experience just being out there [in Baltimore]. It was kind of like, Wow, this is very real out here. They picked an ill place to shoot this...They could have shot on set somewhere that look like the hood and put fake crack vials on the floor and busted glass on the floor, but that was all real” (ch.4). Not only do such descriptions add meaning to the series, but emphasize realism—since the actor was there in person, they can attest that some of the objects or behaviors filmed in the scenes were not props or were not staged—and, moreover, allow the audience to judge by themselves if the story is more believable and realistic in their opinion. Investigating location procurement at such an insider and mid-level stage goes on par with what Gray and Lotz state in their article about critical media industry studies as well. Such tales from the set and the behind-the-scenes bring a different perspective to light than the one the audiences receive in the finished product they consume, and this is why such material is essential for a more comprehensive study of television.

As I have demonstrated, selecting the city for the show's principal locations is conditioned by multiple factors, including and not limited to the creative vision and ideas, production choices, available budget and resources, logistics and efforts required, and the narrative itself. Additionally, permits and approvals, or even agreements, are necessary both to reproduce the city image commercially and to film on location. Finally, the choice will also, if not in the major part, depend on the story itself and what the creators plan to expose in their production. Yet, television and iconicity alike need an audience in order to persist: the former requires viewers in numbers to satisfy the networks, advertisers, and on-demand channel and platform owners; thanks to the audience's response and engagement, the cultural artifacts created for television are circulated outside and across various media and industries. Whereas the latter emerges where the audience's growing interest meets with their emphasis on the unique status of what is deemed iconic, combined with further references and reproductions of and about the iconic item across various contexts, media, and time. Let us thus turn toward the audiences to

glimpse how they contribute to and respond to cities on screen and how city iconicity can be hereby intertwined.

2.5. Audience, Reception, and Dissonance

“I don’t need to watch *The Wire*. I’ve lived in Baltimore for fifty-one years,” told me the Uber driver on the way from downtown Baltimore to a Greyhound/Flixbus bus stop in the east side of the city, located between Bayview and Greektown neighborhoods. During our twenty-minute trip, we conversed about why I was visiting Baltimore at the time and, naturally to me, the discussion flowed toward Baltimore’s representation on *The Wire*, and my expectations based on what I had read and seen before visiting the United States for the first time. “I’ve heard about it [the series], but I never watched it since I already know the place. Television will not show all the things as they really are,” she added. At my prompt about the violence and drugs, she explained that relative safety depends on when and where one finds themselves in the city, and if or to which gang that territory belonged. In *The Wire*’s Baltimore, even though more than two decades prior to our conversation, it seems that one can be approached by a drug addict, a gang member, or a police operative at any given step and time. This short exchange reinforced my realization that not only did we belong to different countries, ages, ethnicities, cultures, but also—perhaps self-evidently—to distinct audience groups.

Audience is one of the four pillars in Gray and Lotz’s *Television Studies*. Perhaps it is too obvious to state that a television program needs a group of viewers and, hopefully for the creators, good reviews to be ordered by the production company beyond its pilot episode or extended for subsequent seasons. Broadcast networks work in an advertisement-based system where viewers are treated as potential customers; on-demand channels and platforms seem more transparent by offering commercial-free or commercial-limited content for a direct fee. Yet, the audience pillar is much more complex than this seemingly clear-cut split of audience-based revenue and audience counts. To understand it better, we should take a short step back to how the research about audiences appeared and developed within cultural and media studies.

Even before cultural studies and media studies were established as separate fields of study, audiences started to appear in research within the mass communication theory, prompted by political unrest of the early twentieth century, political propaganda used by infamous leaders, and the spread of information by use of radio and growing cinema and television. The audience

was assumed as a passive mass that could only receive the intended message without any resistance or critical approach: hence the concept of the commonly-named hypodermic needle theory (ch.3). With the development of television, specifically, from the 1950s, new approaches to audiences were applied by broadcast networks and advertising companies. They strived to understand when to broadcast specific content to assumed groups of viewers to promote their products and persuade the public to buy. They started to analyze audiences to estimate the number and characteristics of groups of viewers who would watch their programs, consequently leading to the establishment of a system of ratings used by networks (Butler 185). Since those networks and advertisers counted audiences in numbers, Nielsen Media Research, in particular, grew in importance for the television industry, focusing on recording total counts of spectators and estimating their demographic data, simultaneously devoting little attention to analyzing, for instance, why viewers chose their programs, how critical of the seen content they were, or what rituals around television they developed (186).

However, the point of view on audiences reduced to numbers and ratings of the corporations and networks was not deterministic. Researchers gradually turned to observing audiences as more active members who viewed television based on their personal preferences, interests, and uses. The development of cultural studies in the 1980s helped to propel new perspectives on the audiences. The paramount contribution to understanding them as groups of engaged and conscious spectators who were part of the process of watching television—and not only as passive recipients—was made by Hall in his “encoding/decoding” theory (ch.3). Hall’s proposal posits the encoder as the sender of a message and decoder as the addressee. However, by distinguishing three kinds of choices on the side of the latter, he treats the decoder as an active participant in the process while treating communication more like a reciprocity than a one-way and linear system. Namely, Hall proposes that the decoder (here, the viewer) can reject the meanings offered in the message (the “oppositional” reading), comply with them even if not fully agreeing with the message (the “negotiated” reading), or accept them as premised by the encoder, in this case by a creator/producer/writer/network (the “dominant-hegemonic” or “preferred” reading)(Gray and Lotz ch.3; Turner, *British Cultural Studies* 72-77). As such, the audience is not only active in deciding how to read and understand the message, but is differentiated from the encoder. Depending on the context, lived experiences, interests of both sides, intended meanings and purposes, the decoder’s understanding may match the planned meanings while

generating new ones, which were missed, overlooked, or intentionally disregarded by the encoder. We could even ask, if the decoder's meanings and understanding of what they watch precisely matched those of the encoder, why should we even consider the resistant approach in the first place? Turner explains how the complexity of society and culture results in this process:

Society is not homogeneous, but is made up of many different groups and interests. The television audience cannot be seen as a single undifferentiated mass; it is composed of a mixture of social groups, all related in different ways to dominant ideological forms and meanings. So there is bound to be a lack of fit between aspects of the production and reception processes – between the producer's and the audience's interpretation of the message – that will produce misunderstandings or 'distortions.' (73)

Thus, the Uber driver has approached *The Wire* in the oppositional approach by consciously rejecting to watch the HBO series altogether. Myself, I would classify according to the negotiated approach, where I could not fully accept nor deny the representations done by Simon and the crew because of my lack of first-person references to confirm or renounce the message. However, by visiting Baltimore, because of the series, I might have infringed on the oppositional category, as it is unlikely that the creators intended to boost tourism in Baltimore at the time.

Further studies and ethnographic methods contributed to considering the audience not only as active participants in the television process who decided on how to read the message, but also as groups of viewers who appropriated, reformed or reshaped, and affected the message by accruing new meanings to what they adored, liked, or disliked. Hence, seeing audiences as cultural groups and the development of fan studies evolved,³³ and tried to reason how viewers select, "rework and rewrite [the televisual text], repairing or dismissing unsatisfying aspects, developing interests not sufficiently explored" (Gray and Lotz ch.3).

Nowadays, gathering information about audiences, their interests and habits—for instance, at what time during the day they stream a series and for how long—can be easily tracked by the streaming platforms, which require the subscribers to have an account.³⁴ Consequently, internet-based distribution seems more promising in terms of more realistic data than the broadcast networks' systems of estimating the audiences. Netflix, for example, offers an option

³³ Henry Jenkins has been active in researching media, pop culture, and fandoms since as early as the early 1990s. His book *Textual Poachers: Television Fans & Participatory Culture* is a seminal work to the fan studies, but we can also find his continuous contributions online on his website henryjenkins.org since 2006.

³⁴ Although, it is questionable how such platforms calculate that an episode was actually viewed in its entirety and they do not openly share more detailed and aggregated data.

to evaluate a movie or a series available on their platform based on three categories: “Not for me,” “I like this,” and “Love this!” Yet, sadly for researchers, as much as the service uses this classification to train their algorithm to display content better aligned to the subscriber’s preferences, questions of how they understood a particular episode or a whole series are still left for ethnographic research to uncover, or for the spectator who would willingly share the opinion online, as the streaming companies do not and cannot share information about viewers.

Accompanying developments of the RTV equipment, more accessible and faster access to radio or television, and newer, more mobile forms of video recording, reproduction and viewing, from VCRs and VHS to DVDs, to internet-distributed content easily accessed on smartphones have all helped to shape new generations of audiences and their practices. No longer confined to the living rooms or public spaces like bars and taverns,³⁵ spectators have steadily gained control over when and where to watch their favorite or saved-to-watch-later programs, without networks or streaming platforms imposing program scheduling or introducing commercial breaks. They have also been more and more enabled to re-share and “recycle” the elements of television content they like by way of reusing, reintroducing, criticizing and commenting on episodes’ stills, series’ tropes, characters, and even special events on their fan pages and blogs, commentary videos or podcasts, at conventions, and many more. With more autonomy and control over everyday rituals, practices, and choices around television, there is little doubt that today’s audiences have become highly interactive among themselves as much as, to a certain extent, heard and heeded by the production companies and networks.³⁶ As a result, it seems only justifiable that new methodologies and approaches in audience studies must be developed to capture the newest intershared and intertextual media content and highly participant audiences.

Before transitioning to the part of the discussion where I link audiences to city iconicity in television series, I would like to make recourse to Turner’s explanations of narrative and how it functions when audiences are concerned. Although the scholar’s book focuses on film, the theoretical approaches to storytelling and world-building narratives he discusses refer as well to other media and stories that “represent” the world to us, “through stories told to us by our parents, read to us from books, reported to us by friends, overheard in conversations, shared

³⁵ See Anna McCarthy’s *Ambient Television: Visual Culture and Public Space* (2001).

³⁶ Twitter hashtags and campaigns have proved to be vital means used by audiences to influence the corporations’ choices. One of the examples could be Netflix’s 2019 decision to pick up *Lucifer* for its fourth season, after it had been canceled by its original network Fox (Braxton).

among groups at school, circulated around the playground” (Turner, *Film* 78). Stories, Turner argues, help us to make sense of the world as they play various social functions, including entertainment and religious purposes (78). “The satisfaction an audience finds in a film does not emerge from the narrative alone,” but from the social context and discourse, stretching beyond the cultural text itself (89-90). As he also observes, “we understand the societies depicted in films through our experience of our own society. As we watch a film and understand it, we look at gestures, listen to accents, or scan a style of dress, in order to place characters within a particular class, taste group, or subculture, for instance” (90).

In other words, each reading of a narrative is based on the practices and values we have gathered from our environment (society and culture), on lived and previous experiences, and on similar narratives we have heard or read in the past. In cinema, “audiences agree to accept an imported system of meaning for the purposes of enjoying the film...Even the coding of Hollywood, while accepted for the purposes of entertainment, will be subject to further definition and mediation by other cultures” (91). The coding and systems of meanings mentioned by Turner are generally referred to as conventions. They organize the text itself and the meanings within it; they also depend on the encoders to use them, or consciously break them, and on the decoders to recognize and understand these conventions in order to enjoy the narrative (93).

However, as everything is mediated through the creators’ vision, experiences, and motivations, even the most realistic and “real” representation will still only constitute a specific version of reality. For instance, “[w]hen we talk of popular films as ‘realistic,’” Turner explains, “we do not necessarily mean they are like ‘real life’; we mean that we have in a sense agreed to respond to their codes and conventions—their established systems of narration—as if they were like real life” (92). Thus, in television, news coverage as much as crime dramas will employ their own conventions and convey their specific meanings. Furthermore, based on our experiences, we can compare gestures, behaviors, conventional clothes, street signs and any other signifiers to what we have lived through, and consequently, feel certain emotions and create specific responses. Furthermore, I would argue that the process of reading and recognizing physical space from television (and other visual media) merits its own classification, which I limit only to the range of cities and American crime dramas for the purpose of this project, but which could hopefully be extended to a broader set of texts and subject to more academic research.

Namely, I propose distinguishing three types of referring to cities on screen: direct, distanced (or transitory), and derived (or mediated). Direct reading of the city represented in a crime drama show would refer to situations when the viewer has a permanent or a long-term direct contact with the city setting of that show, for instance, has lived there for at least several years and is familiar with the physical space, social customs, laws, regulations, behaviors, and dangers, weather patterns, political arena, culturally-dependent characteristics, and many more.

The distanced, or transitory, type, in the simplest terms, would refer to viewers that have experienced the represented city for a short period of time, as a tourist or foreign-exchange student. The viewers-visitors may acquaint themselves with the physical, social, and cultural dimensions of the city, but the acquired knowledge is much more likely to be impoverished in intricacies known to and recognized by long-term residents. Additionally, I would differentiate two types of relating to television cities in the distanced category based on the viewing-visiting sequence. Intuitively, understanding how the space is organized in real life and how it can impact the narrative will be enhanced if the viewer visits the same location before watching the show. For example, from my personal experience, I had visited Lisbon three times before seeing *Night Train to Lisbon* (2013) film starring Jeremy Irons. Thanks to, or perhaps because of, my tourist knowledge of Portugal's capital city, I could better understand where the protagonist moved in terms of the real location, and how it could impact his actions. In a way, I "revisited" the city when watching the film posteriorly.

Conversely, the viewer can first be exposed to more than one source of representations of a particular city and decide to visit the actual location. In this sense, the spectator would revisit the text and compare the city's depiction with the subsequent real-life experience. Drawing again from my personal experience, I could evoke here my countless comparisons between television shows and movies I had seen from Philadelphia (*Rocky* [1976], *Shazam!* [2019]), Washington (*Spider-Man: Homecoming* [2017], *Condor* [2018-2020]), Baltimore (*The Wire*), and New York City (*CSI* franchise, *Before We Go* [2014], and many more) to the physical spaces, distances, textures, perspectives, behaviors and more when I visited these locations afterwards. Walking up the steps to reach the Philadelphia Museum of Art, I thought that the experience was not as tiresome as shown by Rocky (we have to consider he had to run at least a few miles, however), whereas the views from several observation decks in New York City were, in my opinion, as spectacular as on screen.

The third category of how members of an audience can refer to a city is linked to the viewer's recognition of the city only from the mediated content they have been exposed to, from television to tourist guides to city photography on Instagram, and without any in-person experiences from that location. Not possessing direct experiences, the reading of the city space on screen will be even hypothetical in some respects. For instance, if the protagonist needs to travel from point A to point B in the city, the viewer with direct knowledge could use personal experiences and memories to enrich the visual text and its meanings. Thus, the derived kind of reading the city would also seem impoverished and based on comparisons to previously seen content and to the viewer's other city-related knowledge. This threefold distinction, however, should be treated as a prelude or an invitation to a more thorough research within the media audiences. One could perhaps distinguish more separate categories, instead of the three proposed by me for the purpose of this project.

Moreover, these three categories could theoretically converge with Hall's threefold categorization of reading texts from his encoding/decoding theory: oppositional, mediated, and preferred. Taking into consideration the three types of city readings suggested above, I would also argue that the last one—the derived kind—has the least likelihood of generating oppositional meanings to the spatial dimension specifically. If the viewer is not familiar with and does not understand how the built space and infrastructure in a given location are organized, possible inconsistencies caused by the creators and producers' choices may pass by unnoticed, not to mention be rejected by the audience. Simultaneously, those spectators falling under the direct category would have the highest oppositional probability, since they know the city and could recognize incongruities based on their everyday experiences. For instance, they could notice that a character chooses to take the subway to arrive at a given destination but selects a train line that does not go to that area. In such situations, they would experience a dissonance between what is represented on screen and what they know from their direct experiences.

When iconicity is concerned, audiences are active constituents in creating and preserving the iconic status of particular elements from television series: from famous scenes or quotes copied in memes, to reused tropes in subsequent productions, to famous city locations reproduced in photography and videos. Audiences have the potential to do so thanks to their interest and effort to comment on, reminisce, evoke in conversation, analyze for research, or simply appraise an element of or the whole show as iconic. Drawing upon my definition of an

icon in Section 1.7, audiences have a considerable impact on iconicity: they display interest and ascribe meanings to an item which can change with time, intensity, or medium, and across discourses. “Audiences make films [and other media] mean,” says Turner, “they don’t merely recognize the meanings already secreted in them” (*Film* 144). Such interest, although re-shaped, will need to be sustained by newer groups of audiences for an icon to maintain its status, with an understanding that not only fans or avid viewers participate in this process, but also industry workers and decision-makers who themselves constitute specific audiences as well. This perspective would incorporate not only the approach of Sklair, who argues that architectural iconicity is created and maintained by corporations, political organs, industry professionals, and consumers, but also the emphasis of Gray and Lotz on including analyses of the mid-level television industry in the media research.

Focusing on city iconicity in particular, metonymy is a term that should be re-introduced in the context of audiences. Regardless of belonging to the direct, distanced, or derived group, viewers may recognize well-known city landmarks in a television series not only evoking their prior knowledge but also to understand where the events take place and shift. Metonymically, city landmarks can become symbols of the story, values, and meanings that encoders presupposed to include in their production. Additionally, from the audiences’ perspective, the same landmarks will be charged by audiences with emotions and meanings caused by the story and characters, while filtered by their own experiences. Let us evoke New York City’s representations on television among other media: the number of meanings ascribed to this metropolis, direct experiences, derived understandings, and emotions related to it is unmeasurable, and this is not so much because of the number of series and films produced so far but thanks to the countless audience groups and reproductions of the city’s images across media and discourses. *Condé Nast Traveller’s* ongoing article series “On Location” and Thomas Duke’s *steppingthroughfilm@* account on Instagram, which compares existing locations with their cinematic representations, are singled-out examples of the ample amount of online discussions and reproductions about iconic locations, which further their status by prolonging it in the discourse. The audiences can easily participate in these discourses by engaging with the authors or even by creating similar and derivative content themselves. Their active participation, moreover, is enhanced by tours of famous locations and filming grounds organized by the production companies and studios as well as city tours based on films and television series,

offered by residents, and special events organized by fans, ranging from cosplay to recurrent happenings, like the annual gathering at Kings Cross train station to hear the announcement from the *Harry Potter* series. Additionally, lower costs and better capabilities of RTV consumer products have enabled the viewers to turn into creators, for instance in the field of aerial photography and videography or content creation for social media. These examples constitute only a percentile of the types of involvement and content produced by the spectators and fans around and at recognizable cities and locations, which contribute to these sites' iconicity.

Considering Baltimore's case, the televisual iconicity might be biased because of the genre applied and the perspective of the creators on that city, but also by a narrower number of representations in popular media. As far as iconicity is concerned, it most commonly needs the visual aspect for the audiences to base on and reproduce or memorize. Thus, visuality will be yet another—and last in the current project—aspect of television at the intersection with city iconicity, which I will endeavor to explain in the following section. Before doing so, let us turn toward Robert Hariman and John Louis Lucaites' work on iconicity, as they delve into its collective dimension.

Although writing specifically about iconicity in photography and journalism, Hariman and Lucaites raise an interesting point by emphasizing collectivity and reception. They note that the icon offers a safe haven in the storm: *shared perception*, a sense of the sacred, ritual intensity, and continuing influence across borders and time. Amidst the deep pluralism of modern life, the iconic image can anchor meaning: better yet, it seems to anchor meaning in a real, stable referent while holding open a horizon of meaning never reducible to the calculation of known interests. (3; own emphasis)

In this way, the authors take into consideration not only individual readings of icons, but the collective aspect of reading and understanding what an icon is, and what it means in a specific social or cultural group. They further indicate that the icon's meaning can change as it will be used in the process of building a rapport with other groups: “[a]s the image is circulated widely, it's relative disarticulation from the original context can involve loss of meaning, but it also allows appropriation of the symbolic resources in the image for interpreting other historical events and defining one's relationship with other citizens” (9). As a result, we can conclude that collectivity in terms of (city) iconicity cannot be seen in simple aspects of repetition and reproducibility. Even though perceived individually, icons will be grounded in a specific context

and discourse in which the viewer is temporarily situated and anchored in relation to other viewers as well.

However, despite today's apparent ease of sharing opinions and accessing those of others in the diasporic, heavily internet-dependent society, there is a risk of producing content for its purely visual/aesthetic layer, especially when city icons are in question. If audiences give meaning to the content they watch and respond to, they also have the power to maintain, reinforce, or dilute the power of iconicity. In the reality where distractions lurk everywhere, from commercials to pop-up messages on smartphones, to daily chores and usual multitasking (*e.g.* watching television while commuting), our attention towards television can be interrupted at any given moment. This is what Kyle Chayka alludes to in his article, in which he connects the engagement of the audiences to the distractions around a TV show and to its quality. In this context, quality should be understood as coming from a well-written script, complex story arcs, innovative or thought-provoking analysis of a social or cultural problem(s), decorated with a good camera operation, set design, and other visual elements. Writing for *The New Yorker* about *Emily in Paris*, Chayka laments that “[t]he episodic plots are too thin to ever be confusing; when you glance back up at the television, chances are that you’ll find tracking shots of the Seine or cobblestoned alleyways, lovely but meaningless. If you want more drama, you can open Twitter, to augment the experience” (Chayka). Following cultural studies’—and Hall’s especially—theory that every message and its constituent parts have meanings, we cannot fully agree with the term “meaningless” in the sense of “not bearing meanings at all.” Yet, we can conclude from Chayka’s article that the rising number of aesthetically pleasing, ambiance-like episodes do not necessarily carry more sophisticated social or cultural issues for the viewer to uncover. In this way, I will hereby leave the dimension of audiences and their participatory and important role in both television reading and the power of iconicity and will turn to the visual side of television series and the *mise-en-scène*, which are containers of symbols and references that the audience may appropriate for their specific context, space, and time, and assign new meanings to them. In a visually-proficient globalized society where image-based communication has become a norm, as far as informal communication goes, it is crucial to know and recognize some of the techniques utilized by the creators on screen and the possible meanings hidden behind them.

2.6. Visual Style and Iconicity

In the pilot, we established, “When we go to the projects, we go handheld.” After a couple of episodes, I approached Bob Colesberry [co-creator of *The Wire*] and I said, “What these drug dealers are doing is so well-thought-out, I just don’t see like it deserves any less control, visual style, or elegance, than we are trying to apply outside the projects. If anything at all, *we should portray them the same way.*” (Abrams ch.3; own emphasis)

In this brief recollection, *The Wire*’s Director of Photography Uta Briesewitz describes probably one of the most important visual design choices in television history made at the time, considering culturally and socially charged meanings involved with the production. Succinctly, the 2002 HBO series’s cast includes multiple African-American actors, extras, and locals. In the first season, two main power “sides” are seemingly positioned on two sides of the law: the downtown represented by the police and politicians, and the projects, where the gangs operate and where multiple drug addicts struggle to survive day after day. By Briesewitz’s note, initially the creators and producers were planning to distinguish the two opposing groups by applying different camera styles: controlled and elegant for the “lawful” and handheld and, thus, not fully controlled for the “lawless.” This could open further the crevice between these groups when seen from the audience’s perspective. However, approaching both—at a first glance, the good and the bad side—by using the same style, the series not only is consistent in terms of the style, but also adds more equality and dignity to those characters working in gangs or addicted to narcotics, who could be otherwise disregarded or underappreciated because of the side of the law they are shown and the illicit activities they perform. “[W]e should portray them the same way” suggests that neither of the sides is represented as better or worse, as far as the visual style is concerned, and thus allows the audiences to judge the characters and their morality and choices based on their actions.

Although this excerpt pays respect to characters and social groups they represent, it simultaneously exemplifies one of the many decisions creators need to make when producing a cohesive series, and shows that the choice of the camerawork and visual style will impact what meanings and values are therein implicated. In terms of the locations, including on-location shooting, cityscapes and landscapes, specific codes and conventions of the visual language apply as well. Regardless of the breadth of field exposed, from the most scrutinizing close-up on a needle held in a character’s fingers to vast vistas of prairies or building blocks at night, Hartley

and Fiske explain that “[w]hen we look at television, our gaze is controlled by the ‘look’ of the camera...In essence, our look becomes the camera’s look and is confined by the frame around the image” (295). Reaching back to semiotics introduced in the previous chapter, each element included in the camera’s frame can be considered a sign, and thus we can read the screen images as coded in a conventional language that can be deciphered. Indeed, “[t]o understand the camera’s look, it becomes necessary to understand the aesthetic, economic, and technological factors that underpin the camera’s perfunctory gaze” (295).

At the same time, the image can be—and rarely is not—highly manipulated before it arrives at the final form seen by viewers. This should be understood not only in terms of the size of space, the number of objects or people on screen, or their characterization. Hartley and Fiske add that in

[t]he reproduction process of film and video...the three-dimensional physical world is translated into the two-dimensional ‘language’ of television images. This camera language is a major part of the visual style of a television program. It works in conjunction with *mise-en-scène*...and editing...to create a program’s overall visual design. (295)

The aforementioned camerawork would be, thus, the resultant of the decisions made by the Director of Photography along with the producers, creators, and directors on various technical and creative aspects of the camera style, for instance types of shots (close-ups, long shots, extreme long shots), types of lenses (wide-angle or telephoto lenses), color grading³⁷ (cold, warm, neutral), or camera angles (top-down or bottom-up, or point-of-view perspective). All of these elements have their codified uses and meanings in the language of both television and cinema.

The second element listed by Hartley and Fiske is the *mise-en-scène*. According to Butler, it “includes all the objects in front of the camera and their arrangement by directors and their minions. In short, *mise-en-scène* is the organization of setting, costuming, lighting, and actor movement” (Butler 263). Discussing film theory, Turner adds more details to his explanation of the term when he notes that the *mise-en-scène* is

³⁷ Color grading helps to set the mood and atmosphere of the scene. Nowadays, it can easily be applied in post-production thanks to software like Adobe Premiere Pro or Final Cut Pro, but it is still subject to the creators’ decision to maintain consistency and the creative vision from the pre-production stages. Additionally, it is possible to use specific filters directly on the camera lens, but it will not allow for as much changes in the post-production.

a shorthand term for ‘everything that is in the frame’ of a shot...set design, costumes, the arrangement and movement of figures, the spatial relations (who is obscured, who looks dominant, and so on), and the placement of objects which have become important within the narrative (the murderer’s gun, the secret letter, the reflection in the mirror). (*Film* 69)

Consequently, as much as the camera operators and directors manipulate the camera’s “how” the things are represented, what is omitted and what is chosen for the frame, the *mise-en-scène* concerns the objects, characters, and settings within the frame and how they are stylized and lighted.

The third component of the visual style is editing. As far as the camerawork links the real and the represented worlds, and the *mise-en-scène* establishes the reality within the shot—or, “construct[s] relationships [between the elements] within shots”—editing, also called *montage*, helps to establish the relationships between specific shots and scenes in a sequence (59). Opposed to the other two belonging to the pre-production and production stages, editing is done at the last stage, the post-production. It involves manipulating the order of the recorded content to establish a desired sequence of events, as the story in the finished production is not always linear and the filming process does not follow the order of the scenes as they are written in the script, but rather as it is most economical and logistically possible for the production.³⁸ Finally, it is at the editing stage where “[a]dditional image sources such as graphics, animations, still shots, digital video effects (DVEs), and other picture sources may be inserted into the program” (Owens 7). Consequently, the finished episode or the whole season may be garnished with additional shots that help create a specific mood or visual style of a series.

The additional footage does not necessarily come from the main camera or cameras³⁹ set-up, sometimes referred to as the A-roll footage in the audiovisual jargon. Commonly named B-roll footage, such material is secondary to the main narrative but nevertheless “can provide information, context, and most of all a better viewing experience for your audience.” Its applications are manifold: “engaging your audience, establishing shots, transitions, [showing] time, pick-up shots, related objects, subjects, & actions, stock footage, drone footage, and hero

³⁸ It involves renting the equipment, building up the sets, acquiring permissions to shoot on locations, as well as availability of the actors, camera operators, and other crew members.

³⁹ Some television series use a single camera for more control and more cinematic style of production. Others will apply multiple cameras in one setting, which will record a scene from multiple points of view at the same time. This allows for more time efficiency when filming, a very important factor for television series that need to produce one episode on an ongoing, weekly schedule.

shot” (“What Is B-Roll Footage”). Discussing how to create a powerful and attractive to viewers imagery, Owens urges to use the B-roll material and prompts to “[a]lways shoot some cutaways showing the surroundings, general scene, bystanders’ reactions, and so on” (Owens 157, 176). Even though secondary, the B-roll footage affects the main narrative and the visual design, thus it has to match the principal creative idea and be limited not to take too much of the runtime for the storylines to have enough time to develop. Indeed, in the section on post-production, Owens recommends to

[k]eep ‘cute shots’ to a minimum, unless they can really be integrated into the program. These include such subjects as reflections, silhouettes against the sunset, animals or children at play, footsteps in the sand, and so on. They take up valuable time and may have minimal use. However, there are times when beauty shots have their place, such as an establishing shot. (312)

Furthermore, both A- and B-roll footage are subject to the codes of the *mise-en-scène*, editing, and camera style, including the types of shots. Following the generally established convention, Owens distinguishes five types of shots: extreme close-up, close-up, medium shot, long shot, and extreme long shot. This convention is generally explained in relation to the camera’s distance from the character in the frame, but the shots are not limited to it. For example, the extreme close-up will focus on displaying details of characters’ faces to draw the viewer’s attention to their emotions. On another occasion, an extreme close-up can focus on the brown leaves on the ground, struck by falling rain, which would suggest to us the season of the year as well as will set a gloomy mood for the scene. The farther we remove the camera, the less details and the more surroundings will be revealed, and the focus will be placed mostly on the characters and their actions. Going further, it is usually the long shot or the extreme long shot that is employed as the establishing shot to introduce the setting for the following scene (142-45). One of the more common establishing shots in television is the city space footage, therefore let us examine some more instances of the additional material, especially the use of the B-roll material outside of the main narrative. As I will try to prove in the case studies further in the next chapter, such material focusing on the city representation contributes to the power of its iconicity.

Firstly, the shots of city skylines can be used for efficiency purposes. In a matter of seconds, they show where (a specific city or area) and when (the season of the year and the time of day) the following scene will be taking place. These can be establishing shots introducing new

scenes, or transitional shots between two sequences in a storyline. Additionally, time-lapses can also add the dimension of the passage of time, and give an impression of urgency, as the audience sees the represented reality being sped-up. The “show, don’t tell” rule allows the viewers to see and interpret hints and information on their own, without being closely led to conclusions by the creators.

Another aspect of efficiency is related to the scheduling explained in one of the sections earlier. Expressly, television series broadcast on commercial channels which will inevitably be interrupted by advertisement breaks, unless seen at a later time on streaming or another on-demand service. Distracted by the commercials and maybe even prompted to leave from in front of the screen, the viewer will require a moment of time to return to the séance. If the establishing and transition shots are only additional information, the viewer does not risk losing important information about the characters or the events if arriving late from the break. Intuitively, one could also presume that such transitional shots will be less frequent on television shows originally premiering on non-commercial channels and platforms. This will be one of the aspects I would like to examine in one of the case studies. Presently, I would argue that indeed B-roll footage featuring city imagery is used differently in programs belonging to paid platforms and channels, as opposed to broadcast networks.

Secondly, as implied earlier, how the city space is represented in terms of frames and colors will also impact what meanings the audience applies to it. For instance, a bottom-up view of a high-rise on a bright day could imply that it is the middle of a working day and the scene will reveal to us the workers going about their responsibilities at the office. A long shot on a street sets a different mood when displaying a bustling street somewhere in Manhattan as opposed to a deserted street in the suburbs. As the first one can add meanings to the passing of time and the liveliness of the city, the latter can slow down the pace or even imply that something extraordinary will happen next. When the camera slowly glides high over the rooftops in night hours, it can add sensuality and set a romantic mood for the scene to come.⁴⁰

Thirdly, television may try to attract audiences with the visual spectacle of moving cameras, accompanied by fast-paced, energetic music, rapidly changing frames and possibly

⁴⁰ We should not discard the crucial role of the music in television, which impacts the mood and tone of the scenes as well. I do not dedicate much space to this aspect of television production for two reasons. Namely, developing the sound dimension of television series is vast and merits its own separate examination to be properly analyzed and explained. Secondly, this project concentrates on the visual side of iconicity, and can only acknowledge that the music score may enhance its effects.

even some extras or locals busy with their errands. “The positioning of the camera is possibly the most apparent of the practices and technologies which contribute to the making of a film. The use of overhead, helicopter or crane shots can turn film into a performance art, exhilarating in the perspectives it offers the audience,” writes Turner (*Film* 60). At a first glance, this statement seems equally applicable to television, where countless series offer a mini spectacle of aerial views of well-known landmarks and city spaces, like in multiple crime shows *CSI: New York* (2004-2013), *Hawaii 5-0* (2010-2020), *Blindspot*⁴¹ (2015-2020) or *White Collar* (2009-2014). Quoting from Tasker, Turner further reminds us that popular cinema ‘is as much concerned with visual pleasure as it is with narrative development’ and in certain genres—action films for one—‘visual display is elevated to a defining feature of the genre’” (Tasker qtd. in Turner, *Film* 143). This statement opens a door towards an investigation whether contemporary procedural crime shows have incorporated some of the spectacularity to attract the viewers’ attention. It is, however, an investigation that merits its own dedicated space outside this dissertation.

Lastly, to reuse Owens’ term of “beauty shots,” the city imagery could aim to attract viewers with its aesthetics. Although Jim Bizzocchi’s article requires an actualization due to the fast-progressing changes in technologies, equipment, and distribution of the media since 2007, certain of his statements regarding the nature of ambiance videos remain accurate. As he notes, “[t]elevision remains a perceptual chameleon, sometimes commanding our attention, sometimes fading into the background of our lives, but always there” (Bizzocchi). In other words, we could argue that parts of the television flow require our gaze while others are less demanding of our consideration, which would reflect the difference between the main narrative and the inserted B-roll footage that the viewer potentially could miss and still be able to follow the main events. As Bizzocchi analyzes the ambiance video and juxtaposes it with the narrative forms of cinema and television, he claims that

[n]arrative commands attention - we are drawn to story, we have a need to see how the story plays out, and we will continue to want to watch until the end. However, ambient video is in many ways consistent with a cinema of attraction - if the attraction is carefully modulated. Astonishment and awe are not conducive to ambiance, so the visual pleasures

⁴¹ *Blindspot* deserves special recognition for its opening scene in the context of this dissertation: the production did not use special effects and closed Times Square (even if for brief moments over one night) to shoot the first scene of the series. Creator Martin Gero admits, “what we tried to do is ground it in a reality. You can’t beat shooting in the middle of Times Square, which is *one of the most iconic pieces of geography in the entire world, and showing it off in a way that people don’t usually get to see it*. It makes a really exciting opening” (Raftery; own emphasis).

should be seductive, not demanding. We should want to look at them, but we should not feel compelled to do so. (Bizzocchi)

It seems reasonable to state that if the B-roll city footage is secondary to the principal narrative, it would require less attention. The viewer may be interested to see it, but does not have to feel the pressure to do so. Conversely, agreeing with Hall's concept of encoding/decoding, each element of the shot and scene will have its purpose and will mean something when seen by the spectators. Thus, it stands in a contradictory position to the purely aesthetic aspect of the B-roll footage. Considering that episodes are time-bound because of the scheduling system and commercial breaks, as opposed to shows on non-commercial sources, if such footage were to be applied for aesthetic reasons only, it would doubtlessly waste important runtime as well. Consequently, even if called "beauty shots," I will argue that the additional city material will still bear supplementary meanings and be used for efficiency to enhance the overall style and structure of the series.

Avoiding an in-depth examination of the audiovisual grammar and its intricacies, American film and media critic Martha P. Nochimson furthers the discussion of the visual style in broader terms, and the series structure in general, and uses it as one of the key factors in distinguishing formulaic and non-formulaic television. In her book *Television Rewired: The Rise of the Auteur Series*, Nochimson writes about the emergence of the auteur style in television series and discusses with David Lynch (*Twin Peaks* [1990-1991]), David Simon (*The Wire*), and David Chase (*The Sopranos* [1999–2007]) topics revolving around their creativity, philosophy, and motivations to devise the television series which would change the televisual realm for decades to come and which would have not lost their emblematic and critically-acclaimed status for thus long. The critic substantiates her thesis by stressing the creators' modernist approaches to the televisual form, while she defines modernism as

a radical shift away from traditional beliefs in the inherent meaning of our daily reality represented by closed structures, absolute values, continuity, definitive solutions, certainties, and unified identities. Increasingly, through the offices of modern physics, philosophy, art, and psychology, the modern world sees itself in terms of a discontinuous, random, uncertain universe of boundless energy inside and outside of us, ceaselessly moving particles, and relative cultural and linguistic terms. (6-7)

Using the complex narrative structure and new tactics within the visual style, “[t]he David effect,” the critic continues, “reenvisions familiar characters—the detective, the gangster, the police officer, and more—from a modernist perspective that binds us not to the vacuum of the factory-tooled narrative but to cutting-edge science, art, philosophy, and psychology” (8). Consequently, Nochimson defines non-formulaic television by its ability to suscite questions from the very beginning (the pilot episode), to provoke audience’s curiosity to wonder about the rules governing the universe, and to expose natural and cultural enigmas that would speak to our fascination about the world. Contrarily, formulaic television’s premise is the search for answers: questions are not important as much as the solutions, which ultimately will lead us to a conclusion and stability (15).

Developing her comparison between these two types, Nochimson also emphasizes the difference in their audiovisual components when she states that “the astonishment of nonformulaic television comes from a visual and aural poetry that augments looking/seeing and hearing/listening, disturbs stock reactions, and makes us think and feel...The disturbing visuals and sound are an organic part of the nonformulaic narrative, not, as in formulaic TV, merely an interesting decoration” (16).⁴² At this moment, it is worth to recall Chakya’s opinion of Paris’s landmarks featured in *Emily in Paris*, whose representation he deemed as “lovely but meaningless.” What Nochimson suggests by this division could, at least partially, be applied to the city imagery as “beauty shots” used for their aesthetic purposes only for formulaic series, as opposed to having additional purposes and meanings in the non-formulaic television. For instance, if the audience recognizes the same structure or vista from countless similar representations in other media, they indeed will not have to mobilize to “think and feel” about it in a new manner.

The visual design comprising the camera work, the mise-en-scène, and the editing will shape our reading and interpretation of what is in the frame based on the minutiae like objects and general set design, to color grading, to how the whole scene is represented, from what angle and from whose perspective. In terms of the city, its represented reality will also be kneaded by

⁴² With this division, it would be very easy to make a connection to the broadly referenced quality television, which usually encapsulates all *Twin Peaks*, *The Sopranos*, and *The Wire*. Nevertheless, such a clear-cut split between quality and non-quality or non-formulaic and formulaic television cannot be made hastily. As some of the contributors to *Quality TV: Contemporary American Television and Beyond* explain, the criteria to define what quality television is and what visual aesthetics need to be fulfilled to be considered as such have not been clearly defined; instead both the term and the technical criteria have been used intuitively.

the use of the visual grammar, and consequently even may reinforce, change, or create new readings of that location, as suggested above.

Consequently, as far as the city iconicity is concerned, the repetitive appearance of certain well-known cities, structures, or skylines is the most obvious contributor to the power of iconicity. Yet, as stated elsewhere in this dissertation, iconicity requires more ingredients besides repetition to be able to emerge, and thrive in cultural and social groups. In other words, how often a specific image is circulated is one aspect of iconicity. Perhaps even a more important one is *how* that image is constructed, in terms of the technical dimension, and what emotions it evokes, in terms of the audience reception: is it memorable? attractive? appalling? romantic? controversial? To be memorable or attractive, the image has to stand out and appeal to the viewers. Counterintuitively, I would argue that it is not so much the case of the aesthetics only that plays a decisive part in the realm of television, but the codes and conventions that utilize specifically stylized imagery for efficiency, cohesiveness, and the disruption-prone nature of watching television. Moreover, if icons are polysemic and are created depending on various discourses and contexts, I further propose that the material representing city imagery will contribute to the iconicity because it provokes not one but many meanings among the viewers, depends on the choices in the development and production stages as well as on how it is made and later read and interpreted by the audiences. All these elements will impact the city iconicity as they are contingent upon the context and discourse of production and reception.

This subchapter dedicated to the visual reading of the episodes, or more generally, to one of the forms of textual analysis available for dissecting television materials, ends the chapter that has attempted to follow the theory about critical media industry studies (CMIS) as proposed by Havens, Lotz, and Tinic, and the four-pillared perspective on television suggested by Gray and Lotz. The first chapter introduces the elusive concept of iconicity with a focus on its correlation with the city, including its landmarks and architecture. The second chapter first presents an overview of television's evolution, including key technological changes and inventions that have changed how we view television now, and develops sections informed by the quadruple division of television studies aspects introduced *Television Studies*: industry (here partitioned into scheduling, idea development and early production, location and settings procurement), audience (reception and dissonance), textual analysis (visual style), and context. The latter has not received its own dedicated space on the pages of the present dissertation, but nevertheless

underlies the previous three spheres: from the kinds of devices we can watch televisual content, to networks and platforms business-specific niches and requirements (or liberties) to produce and distribute television programs, to new practices of audiences that contribute to the good reception and circulation television-based content, or that distract them from focusing on the show currently on the air, to finally newer technological solutions that capture and display ultra-quality imagery on television sets, projectors, smartphones, and beyond.

At the end of each of the parts within the second chapter, I have tried to display how the creative choices, industry-motivated decisions, audience responses, and visual language of the episodes can ground, magnify, re-establish, and expand the iconic status of represented American cities. In the third—and last—chapter, however, I will try to demonstrate that despite the city being represented in a television show, there are some differences—not so much generic, but discursive, visual, and creative—that may not enhance the power of iconicity at all, or do it in such a way that the iconicity will prevail, but not in a visual sphere, but in the contextual/discursive one instead. Following the structure of this chapter, the analysis of the case studies will retrace the path along the industry, audience, and text analysis, with the contextual information permeating the inquiry.

III. City Iconicity in American Television Crime Drama - Case Studies

This third chapter will be devoted to two case studies. As aforementioned, the analysis will bring to the center stage the first episodes of *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation*, set in Las Vegas, Nevada, and of *The Wire*, set in Baltimore, Maryland. I will not aim at making a comparison and evaluating that one or another contributes to city iconicity better or worse than others, for instance, that television series considered as quality television make the city visible in a more sublime way, or that procedural cop shows have more city footage that is better aesthetically. Instead, I would like to propose a statement that as much as all of them take part in the power of iconicity, its intensity will be shaped differently based on several factors like creators' decisions, the production's constraints, city officials' motivations, visual style, and possible audiences' readings based on metonymic connotations. Discarding the evaluative approach, I will focus on a more open approach, presenting possibilities and tracing their impact on city iconicity.

The two pre-selected case studies are linked to each other in multiple ways. First and foremost, they were created and distributed (in the United States) in the early 2000s. The technological developments that were available at the time—and that have occurred since then—must be considered, as they have allowed, for example, for more mobility, less costs, and better image quality. Secondly, the creators were involved in the original series but, as they had come from different backgrounds, they learned the craft of television production while making their now-signature shows. Avoiding comparisons of the nature “who is a better creator? Who is a more skilled producer? Which creators better captured the city?” my interest here lies in the creators' and producers' backgrounds and experiences, which could have their imprints on the series and the city representation therein.

There are conspicuous differences between the two series as well. HBO's productions can be classified as serials, in which several episodes or complete seasons are required to tell one of the plotlines. Bruckheimer-produced *CSI* series are examples of a cop procedural show in which one or two crimes are committed, investigated, and closed within one episode.⁴³ Narrative-wise, Simon and Co.'s 2002 series and his later productions lean towards chaos that permeates various layers of society, from the justice and health systems, to politics and work reforms, to education,

⁴³ Although it needs to be mentioned that procedural television shows can feature a two-episode mini story arc, where the first episode ends with a suspense or opens the premise for the background storyline for most of the season ahead.

whereas crime procedurals, like the Las Vegas-set *CSI*, are able to contain the chaos and bring the televisual reality to a status quo after the initial disruption, *i.e.* a murder case or kidnapping.

Thus, I will introduce each series in more detail in the following sections while maintaining the order I attempted to follow in Chapter 2 according to Gray and Lotz's four pillars for television series: text, industry, audience, and context. I will, however, begin each description with the context first, including general trends in television at the time. I will then consider the industry, painting a picture starting from the individual creators and entertainment-savvy producers, passing to economic concerns of more giant corporations, whose decisions may be oriented towards profits, or the creative process, which sometimes do not coalesce. Location selection and executive choices around it will follow, which allow for linking it to the audiences' responses to the series, especially what their responses to the world represented in the shows were. Lastly, I will provide a few exemplary shots from the selected episodes to accentuate how the formulaic and audiovisual aspects play their parts in the power of city iconicity.

3.1. *Beautiful Las Vegas and Ugly Crime in CSI: Crime Scene Investigation*

CSI: Crime Scene Investigation premiered in the 2000/2001 season on CBS and was the first in a crime procedural franchise that, two decades later, would grow to include four separate "TV programs, graphic novels, video games" by using its distinctive style as one of the methods to "differentiate its brand from other competing ones" (Butler 427). Set in the city of Las Vegas the narrative follows a fictional police unit at the Criminalistics Division of the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department, who lead us through the process of investigating and solving criminal cases. The series was discontinued in 2015, after running for fifteen seasons, and doubtlessly left an imprint on television, especially when the visual style and procedural dramas are concerned.

In the 1990s, the television industry had arrived at a crossroads. On the one hand, the "traditional" broadcast networks and cable were approaching a dead end where television was oversaturated with similar content across multiple genres. As explained earlier, commercial television, especially drama, is a sales tool that generates profits. Incentivized by those gains at the time, more players flocked to invest in not only separate shows, but also whole television networks. As Dunne presents this period in an almost dramatic—pun intended—way,

So much were the networks regarded as money machines, that people and corporations with little or no show-business experience began to buy or construct their own networks. Fledgling webs sprang up almost overnight, hankering to get in on the riches. With more networks came the need for even more “mind candy.” But producing simply more of the same candy wouldn’t do. New types of shows, all derivative in some way, were developed in every genre. Drama was twisted and turned until it was barely recognisable. The massive appetite for programmes to fill all the broadcast hours created a business concerned with quantity over quality. (104)

With quantity ruling over quality, the productions followed easy-to-repeat forms and conventions of style and narrative. For content producers, it was a way to fill in the broadcasting time schedule. For the viewers, more content of the same structure became redundant and predictable (106). Simultaneously, as the broadcasters feared the challenge set by a new wave of television series, like *The Sopranos*, which would later be deemed quality television, the advertisers became more cautious and discerning when investing in new ventures on television (Thompson xix).

On the other hand, quality programming was growing in force at the televisual scene, with HBO as the beacon to the original, bold, and controversial content that threatened to hail the audiences away from the broadcast and cable channels. A different kind of content, longer narrative form, and lack of commercials posed as additional advantages for the viewers to ponder over changing their watching habits along with the channel they consumed.⁴⁴ Therefore, the commercial television companies were forced to try to keep their audience numbers at satisfactory levels by finding attractive content and new forms for their productions, but still not as challenging as the HBO content since the “thought-provoking stories are not compatible with commercials” (Dunne 110). The networks had to create their own beacons and, Thompson notices, “[o]ne response was to lean heavily upon the procedural dramatic franchises like *Law & Order* (1990-) and *CSI*, which seemed to do just fine without cursing, nudity or scripts that sounded like they were written by comparative literature majors” (xix).

⁴⁴ In a recent interview for 3vision’s Inside Content, Anthony Zuiker mentions not only commercial breaks but also commercial banners announcing other programs that are considerable disturbances for the viewers. The banners obscure part of the screen and the evidence examined by the crime unit analysts, while the commercial breaks usually have a higher sound pitch and cut into the episode without any notice. These two examples hinder the seamless watching of a series and appear to be of lower quality than when the same series is accessed on a streaming platform, for instance *CSI* seen on Paramount Plus (“Anthony Zuiker on the the [sic] success of *CSI*” 00:06:20-07:00).

Anthony E. Zuiker is the creator of the *CSI* franchise. Illinois-born, he grew up and finished his education in Las Vegas. As he explains in a TED Talk organized at Oaks Christian School in Westlake Village, California, he was a hustler, but he also was a dreamer. Despite not coming from a wealthy family and growing up without a father, Zuiker drew inspiration from disappointments in his life to prove other people wrong—including his father—and to show that he deserved the success. He also enjoyed writing. He knew he wanted to be a writer; he loved it up to the point of preparing school papers for other college students. After graduating from the University of Las Vegas, Zuiker worked as a tram driver on the Strip, between the Mirage Hotel and Treasure Island. As he recounts, he did not stop to be a dreamer (Zuiker 00:00:53-08:42). However, with the *CSI* franchise now a multi-million-dollar enterprise overflowing from television to other media, Zuiker does not mention in his interviews that *CSI* was actually his dream project. Nor does he say he wanted to promote his city in any way, or expose its hidden ailments, struggles, and secrets.

Thanks to his script for *The Runner* (1999; also set in Las Vegas) and despite an unsuccessful attempt to release a sports movie about the Harlem Globetrotters basketball team, Zuiker made connections to the television industry and to Hollywood workers, including Jerry Bruckheimer. In the late 1990s, Bruckheimer was interested in expanding to television and was looking for ideas. Zuiker pitched one: “maybe something in the forensic world?” (Zuiker 00:10:35-8; Garrahan).

Zuiker knows Las Vegas but is not inclined to analyze and try to solve the city’s issues. He grew up near Rochelle Avenue and has lived in Sin City for many years, seeing and growing around the casino culture and money-based tourism. It seems natural the city became a backdrop for the first *CSI* and some of his other projects. “They say, write what you know,” says Zuiker in a podcast interview for RM 15. Las Vegas offered a myriad of possibilities for the fictional forensics team in terms of sources of inspiration for crime scenes. As Zuiker explains, “we also understood that the CSIs would be working the graveyard shift...that sort of ten to six in the morning, so that would really show the underbelly of the city.” Interestingly, as a tram driver, he also worked the night shift from 9PM to 5AM. When he later started having ride-alongs with the crime analysts, he also realized that “all the good stuff happens between ten at night and six in the morning” (“Anthony Zuiker” 00:05:00-07:35). Consequently, the choice of Las Vegas appears to be instrumental, and dictated by the interest about many crime scenes found there.

With little experience and fresh to making television, still before his thirties at the time, Zuiker mentions Carol Mendelsohn and Ann Donahue as his mentors, who supported *CSI* and *CSI: Miami* as executive producers as well as guided him in the industry (00:27:45-28:40). The two female producers had already produced a few other shows in the 1990s, but neither seems to have personal connections to Las Vegas.⁴⁵ Neither does Jerry Bruckheimer, another significant influence on the franchise from the creation and production perspective, founder of the Jerry Bruckheimer Films production company.

Bruckheimer initially produced films for Hollywood, and did that with immense success: he and his cohort knew how to produce spectacular, cinematic content. In their library until the 2000s, we can find titles like *Beverly Hills Cop* (1984), *Top Gun* (1986), *Bad Boys* (1995), or *Armageddon* (1998). Fast-paced action, energetic cast, popping-out colors, bold and charismatic characters, and big stakes with special effects are some of the recognizable features of the “Bruckheimer style” in productions bearing the company’s logo up to this day (Booth). In 1996, expanding in the entertainment industry, the Jerry Bruckheimer Television division⁴⁶ came into being to produce, unsurprisingly, television content. Already in 2005, Bruckheimer was an established producer both in cinema and television. As William Booth enumerates,

For a long time, [Bruckheimer] was called Mr. Blockbuster, responsible for big movies with big stars, big budgets, big explosions...And then, five years ago⁴⁷ [in 2000], the son of a Detroit clothes salesman did something unusual for a wildly successful feature film producer: He turned his eye to television. Now they call him “Jerry Bruckheimer, the megaproducer,” and, the most honorific of all: “the man with the golden gut.” (Booth)

Au contraire, Bruckheimer modestly states, “[w]e are a content company...[w]e sit here and we create content” (Booth). Simple as it may appear, there are countless choices to be made every day; multiple ideas are discarded, some others are refined and selected to be pitched to networks. But as the producer explains, he wants to make content that he would enjoy as a viewer and a customer.

⁴⁵ It needs to be stated that it is very difficult to find much information about Ann Donahue.

⁴⁶ Even though the company was founded in 1996, Andreeva credits *CSI* for helping to launch the new division at the turn of the century (Andreeva).

⁴⁷ We have to consider a slight inadequacy of the timeline in this statement. *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* had its premiere in the fall of 2000, but we should be aware that the television production starts many months prior, considering that Booth mentions Bruckheimer’s interest in television itself, not the release of the television show.

Given that the *CSI* spin-offs have been adapted to other locations and media, and that many of his productions look for action-filled scenes and entertaining characters, a deeper analysis of a city, or a focus to show its cultural, social, or economic problems does not seem in Bruckheimer's interest to see, and even less to produce. Considering these interests and his company's style, it seems almost practical that the city and how it has been represented in films and series marked by Bruckheimer production firms, including *CSI*, is part of his entertaining, captivating, and energetic style rather than transpiring from his preoccupation with the city's inner workings and struggles (Booth). Similar to Zuiker, to whom Las Vegas was an obvious choice from his long-lived background and commonplace crime-related inspirations.

CSI was first pitched to ABC, who rejected the idea. CBS did not pass on Zuiker's suggestion, however, and have been rewarded with a globally-known crime franchise, cherished up to this day. Having home on broadcast television means that the episode time slots must accommodate time for commercial breaks. Consequently, *CSI*'s episodes follow a format of one-hour slots, which include around forty minutes of the show, with the remaining time devoted to commercial breaks in-between and at the end of each episode. As I already suggested, the breaks constitute a distraction that may force viewers to turn their attention outside the program they have been watching. As a result, it seems logical that the first shots after the commercials would be something that the spectators can potentially miss—if they have left to the kitchen, for instance—like a city sequence. Still, because of the evidence-based and investigation-focused style, they should not want to fail to see later scenes following the case, examining evidence, participating in interrogations and so on to guess the culprit along with the detectives. In this way, I would argue that the city imagery inserted at such transitory instances is as well instrumental, short and visually attractive to signal the viewers back to the viewing, and determined by the episode and advertisements time scheduling.

Airing one episode per week over many months of the season, the series was so successful with the audiences that it received the golden spot in the scheduling shortly after its premiere: initially scheduled at 9PM on Friday, October 6th, 2020, during the so-called “graveyard shift,” the first episode gathered more than 22 million viewers, making it the seventh show for the week, shortly after which the network decided to move *CSI* to the Thursday evening time slot (“Anthony Zuiker ” 00:10:10-11:20). It has received “[t]he mantle of ‘quality’ police drama,” being “the tent-pole programme in the CBS network’s Thursday schedule, the most

significant weekday evening in the USA” (Bignell 162). For its subsequent season, “*CSI* achieved the second-best ratings of any programme,” Jonathan Bignell adds (162).

Highly successful from the beginning, the series brought millions of viewers in front of their TV sets, and later continued to spread in a global distribution, for example, in the United Kingdom on Channel 5, which helped to rebrand that television channel considerably, as outlined by Ian Goode (118-28). Continuous re-runs up to today, the possibility of recording the episodes on VHS or DVR in the past and present, and most recently, the spread of streaming, all contributed to the franchise’s success. One of the testaments of its popularity and demand is that the franchise “broke the Guinness World Record for the largest television drama simulcast of all time,” airing simultaneously in 171 countries on March 4, 2015⁴⁸ (Wagmeister). Even though Las Vegas is “only” a backdrop for the investigation process and crime solving in each episode, it nevertheless has reached a substantial exposure to audience groups around the world over two decades, including the first *CSI*’s broadcast era and subsequent presence in replays as well as on streaming via Paramount Plus.

Additionally, as Zuiker points out in a recent interview for 3Vision’s Inside Content, the broadcast format allows the series to stay on the air for most of the year. Contrary to the streaming style where the whole seasons are usually released the same day or are shorter than twenty episodes, the broadcast content is not easily forgotten by the viewers, who can continue discussing it and speculating regularly from week to week (“Anthony Zuiker on the the [sic] success of *CSI*” 00:07:00-11:00). As a result, I would argue that, even if secondary to the creators’ and producers’ motivations, Las Vegas not only receives an enormous exposure in terms of the count of spectators counted by episode, both locally and internationally, but also a long-term, repeated, and consistent publicity, sustained by the weekly episode release on broadcast as its original distribution format.

From the audience’s perspective, *CSI* introduced a new style and approach to showing criminal case-solving on television. One of the more appealing factors to the spectators could be the feeling of closure, transpiring from the narrative itself. Namely, the majority, if not all, of the episodes offer a pay-off where “the bad guys” are caught for their wrongdoings. According to Carol Mendelsohn, one of the executive producers on the show, “because *CSI* was very black

⁴⁸ The record was broken again a few weeks later by *Game of Thrones* airing in 173 countries (“Largest TV Drama Simulcast”).

and white – the evidence never lies – it was comforting in a grey world. There is comfort when Gil Grissom [from *CSI*, played by William Petersen] or Horatio Caine [from *CSI: Miami*, acted by David Caruso] or Mac Taylor [from *CSI: New York*, portrayed by Gary Sinise] are on the case. There aren't many people you can trust in the world today" (McLean qtd. in Bignell 165). Allowing for a sense of closure which keeps the status quo in place after the cases have been solved, *CSI* brought to the forefront the process and technicalities of the forensics that were novel and required a new visual language to be shown in an engaging way, which would prove advantageous for the franchise.

Despite some underlying storylines of the main cast characters, *CSI* is a television series as it "is a narrative form that presents weekly episodes with a defined set of recurring characters. Each week's episode is self-contained. Although they will occasionally have two-part episodes or a narrative arc that recurs, the narrative of a series does not consistently continue from one week to the next" (Butler 58). Moreover, "[e]ach episode does not begin where the previous one ended, as episodes do in the television serial" (58). Consequently, one could say that *CSI* is too predictable and not watch it. In reality, the series' success lies in *how* it treats the process of investigation that has appealed to millions of viewers. "The massive audiences that the special effects attract are seduced by the procedure of crime solving, not the characters who solve them," explains Dunne (101). "Procedural shows focus on crime and the goriest details of them. It is shock television, not drama, the result of which fosters telling stories of horrible criminal behaviour, and the ice-cold, emotionless people who solve them. The lens is on the underbelly of humanity," which is an interesting choice of words considering that Zuiker suggested the night shift to be the perfect opportunity to see the underbelly of Las Vegas (101). Bignell also notes that "[i]n common with *Homicide: Life on the Street* [1993-1999; based on a book by David Simon introduced in the second case study], it is much less about the commission of crimes than the process of solving them" (163). Admitting that as much as the narrative and characters are essential, "the relationship between visual style and the body is *CSI's* greatest innovation" (163). In the moments where the criminalists lead us by the hand, putting into words what we can observe on the screen or guess from the clues,⁴⁹ the camera zooms into close-ups and extreme

⁴⁹ *CSI* has occasionally experimented with the televisual format. *CSI: New York's* episode "Unspoken" (season 9, episode 4) added a great emphasis on the "visual" aspect of the television drama, as it does not include any dialogues in the first half of the episode. Consequently, it mobilizes the audiences to follow the events and draw conclusions from what is displayed, without the help of detectives and police officers.

close-ups to expose microscopic evidence. It displays computer-generated images to simulate body organs or bullet trajectories, visualizing what the detectives or medical specialists refer to. A significant amount of episode time will be spent on crime scenes around the city or in the laboratory.

Thus, we must also consider where the places are filmed and set. As Butler illuminates, “the aesthetics of crime dramas and other action genres demand exterior shooting to facilitate the fast-paced movement of people and cars around city streets. Moreover, location shooting adds a certain patina of ‘realism’ to these programs, which is another aesthetic concern” (264). It is simultaneously crucial to the city itself, which is not only represented from a high level, as suggested in the establishing or transitory shots, but also on the street level. “The main function of narrative sets is, obviously enough, to house characters engaged in a story,” says Butler, but the choice of settings is not innocent: “sets in fiction television are not just neutral backgrounds to the action; they also signify narrative meaning to the viewer,” which echoes Hall’s representational theory (Butler 264, Hall 1-41). What is more, “these sets and props serve as objective correlatives, or symbols, of the characters who inhabit and use them...[T]hey are narrative *icons*—objects that represent aspects of character. Remaining sensitive to the iconography of television programs can help the analyst understand just how characterizations are created” (Butler 265; own emphasis). We can understand from this that Las Vegas’s bright lights at night, colorfully-lit famous hotels and casinos, and the Strip, all signify something, even if treated as a background to the crime unit. Furthermore, seemingly insignificant background locations of crime scenes can add more information about what happened. In this particular case, because the focus is on the microscopic, not the grand skyline vistas, when the city-wide shots appear, they will metonymically stand for the crimes and “enlarged” locations where they occurred.

In spite of the apparent realism, however, the crime drama is also a visual spectacle. Firstly, as Dunne observes, “the dramatic dynamic has changed...from stories about people and purpose, to stories capitalising on *visual feats*. These new stories involve genres that can best show off technology” (101; own emphasis). Secondly, the episodes comprise the dramatic parts of characters interacting, talking, and investigating, but the spectacle happens when the forensic examination “under the microscope” takes place. Thirdly, *CSI* treats crime cases by their number, not by depth. The purpose of each episode is to address and close the case, identifying the

culprits and their possible motivations, without delving into broader social or cultural layers and contexts of the city. The episodes, thus, focus on the process and closure, not on understanding *why* so many crimes happen in Las Vegas. After each stage of the investigation and when the cases are solved, the city footage regularly helps us to reinforce the view that the city, overall, is still attractive, returned to the state of balance, and, implicitly, safe because the crime unit stands watch night and day. Finally, if it is the forensic process that is on the main display, from the narrative point of view, such city shots are dispensable; they do not bring new information about any of the cases, which sustains the argument that they are used for the structural purposes of the episode broadcast on commercial television, in need to maintain its runtime, and stylized according to the preferences of the producers. Let us render this theory more contextualized by analyzing the first episode of the *CSI* phenomenon.

Unceremoniously titled “Pilot” and directed by Danny Cannon, the episode opens with a sequence interchanging Las Vegas footage at night (figure 1) and a man loading a pistol (figure 2). A male voice in a voicemail recording explains that he is going to commit suicide. The shots of Las Vegas immediately locate the audience in place and time. The presence of the gun corresponds to *CSI*’s central theme of crime. We are then introduced to “the nerd squad” when entomologist Gil Grissom and detective Jim Brass (Paul Guilfoyle) arrive at the scene to examine the body (“Pilot” 00:01:00). The episode establishes the premise of the series—solving “crimes most labs render unsolvable”—as soon as Grissom and Brass learn that the voice from the recording does not belong to the victim (00:08:00-03).

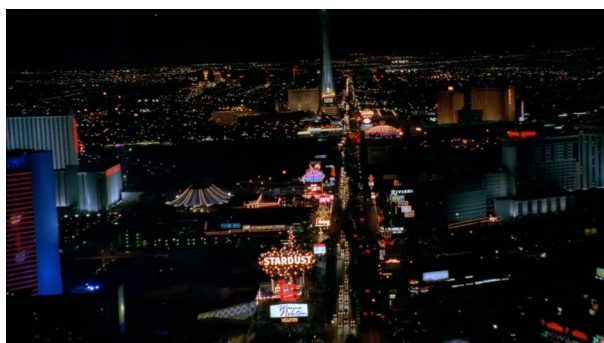


Fig. 1. “Pilot.” *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation*, 00:00:02. The opening shot.



Fig. 2. “Pilot.” *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation*, 00:00:08. An extreme close-up on a pistol.

The title sequence that follows lasts thirty seconds (00:03:05-35). It begins with two shots of Las Vegas downtown (figure 3). Then the title card appears with a white inscription over the

blue-and-black background. The remaining shots are composed of shots of future episodes with the main cast, intersected by flashing close-ups and dynamic images related to the series' theme: fingerprints on a scanner, a bullet under a microscope, a mannequin's head. The additional reference to Sin City is a short shot of neon lights with the "Las Vegas" name (figure 4). The sequence is fast-paced, but slows down when the cast and their names are presented. In this way, the opening credits use the city's iconicity, its symbolic view of the brightly lit hotels, casinos, and main avenues downtown to mobilize the viewers' attention, their knowledge of where the series will be anchored, and what pre-existing connotations to the city they might already have. After this is established, the sequence devotes more time to present the actors.



Fig. 3. "Pilot." *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation*, 00:03:05. The camera moves above the city.



Fig. 4. "Pilot." *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation*, 00:03:30. "Las Vegas" and neon lights.

After the opening sequence, the exposition of the members of the unit and its functioning is mostly done from the perspective of Holly Gribbs (Chandra West), a newly hired member of the squad. The camera shifts between different scenes, crimes, and investigators across the episode: as Gribbs attends her first autopsy and then collects evidence at a store after an attempted robbery, Catherine Willows (Marg Helgenberger) and Warrick Brown (Gary Dourdan) are investigating a murder case while Nicholas 'Nick' Stokes (George Eads) is trailing leads related to a series of thefts on drugged victims. By the end of the episode, all the crime cases are solved. Additionally, the emphasis on the quantitative aspect of solving cases is also reinforced by a professional rivalry between Stokes and Brown, who want to be promoted to the next stage detective: both have solved ninety-nine cases; whoever solves one hundred of them receives the promotion. That competition is resolved by the episode's conclusion as well.

The elaborate cast, interconnections between them, and several cases being in progress simultaneously demand an organization for the viewer to keep track of what is happening and

where the camera has shifted to (figures 5, 7, and 8). Such instances use either bird's-eye or extreme long shots of the city and its recognizable buildings or long shots presenting the scene, where the characters enter. The outside scenes are shot on location, yet they are only able to add a superficial level to the city's representation. In the pilot, the crimes are not related to broader contexts of society, economy, or culture of the area where they have happened. Furthermore, the aerial view shot is used as well after the first commercial break (figure 6), but it is not present on every occasion, and happens less often the further the episode develops. They should be kept at a minimum as they take valuable runtime and do not belong to the main narrative (Owens 312).

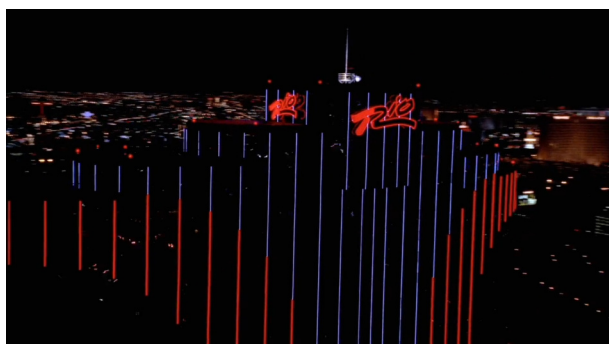


Fig. 5. "Pilot." *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation*, 00:09:00. The scene is going to shift from Brass and Grissom to Stokes.



Fig. 6. "Pilot." *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation*, 00:14:03. The first shot after the post-commercial black-out.



Fig. 7. "Pilot." *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation*, 00:16:15. Grissom drops off Briggs at a scene.



Fig. 8. "Pilot." *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation*, 00:27:21. Stokes arrives at a car accident scene.

Not only do such shots help to maintain a structure around scene transitions and transitions pre- and post-breaks, but also enhance the pace and lively color palette recognized in some of Bruckheimer's other productions. Additionally, all of them serve as zoom-out moments after which the viewers zoom in alongside the camera to evaluate the scene, be it evidence or

questioning of a witness. Indeed, “[t]he visual style is founded on closely scrutinising the surfaces at the crime scene using the optical technologies and other machinery of the forensic laboratory,” which in *CSI* need to approach the situation from a very close perspective (Goode 125). We zoom into the city to follow the criminalists while they are solving the crimes; we as soon zoom out when the crime is solved. As Goode notes,

[t]he televisual qualities of *CSI* are located in the techniques that enlarge, magnify, manipulate and expose the depths and details of the surface to create a spectacle of the surface...One of the consequences of this emphasis upon the surface of detail is to limit the degree of social context given to the violent crimes of Las Vegas. (127)

This reinforces the statement that the producers nor the creators attempt a critique of the city life and its multiple layers. Moreover, as suggested earlier, the city footage’s use in this case is dictated by the episode structure. Even though the city landmarks and characteristic features like neon lights do not add information to the evidence, they sustain the mood of never-sleeping Las Vegas. These images consequently work on the iconicity of the city, because they repeatedly use well-known city imagery that encompasses the many events and crimes within it, thus allowing for multiple connotations and interpretations. Metonymically, Las Vegas’s skyline and landmarks substitute the details we learn during the episodes.

Overall, in the *CSI*’s case, the city iconicity is established and maintained on the level of the creator’s background, the visual style characteristic for the Jerry Bruckheimer Television, the distribution by a commercial television network and its program scheduling—which has to include advertisement breaks—as well as an attractive, aesthetically-pleasing, and dynamic visual and narrative style from the audience’s perspective. The popularity of the series has helped to expand the franchise and, at the same time, has promoted the city’s image even if that city is examined from a quantitative, not a qualitative, perspective. The city, thus, gains exposure in a vivid, even romanticized, visual style of aerial shots that are secondary to the main narrative—the crimes. I would go even further and argue that the city iconicity in *CSI* works on the basis of a contrast: on the one hand, the distanced view obscures details and we can only admire the view; on the other hand, accompanying the characters, we observe the minutiae and clues to recreate the focused picture—the crime. However, as the series could “survive” without the city imagery, it could hardly continue without investigation-related shots and sequences. In the end, there are “beauty shots” of the big city and “ugly shots” of its underbelly when victims are found and

autopsied. The former is included to balance out the latter, and to maintain the status quo *CSI* is trying to preserve.

CSI poses an interesting case to note because of its implicit contradiction. It applies a repetitive structure, yet it was a novelty in American crime drama. It is anchored in Las Vegas because of its iconic imagery and the creator's in-person experience, but it can be easily transplanted elsewhere. Between Las Vegas, Miami, and New York City spanning the franchise, the detectives and their teams solve similar crimes, although in settings tinged by the vernacular: Las Vegas's focus on casinos and entertainment, Miami's closeness to the Everglades and a more tropical climate, and New York's multi-cultural melting pot directly affected by the 9/11 events. The CSIs perform their work in distinct environments, but their profession remains the same across those locations. President of Jerry Bruckheimer Television Jonathan Littman adds that "every country has crime, people love solving crimes along with what's going on TV, and we made it feel a little bit play-along because we were presenting the evidence to the audience, we had these flashbacks that would bring these moments to life, no one had told the story that way" (Andreeva). The crime, thus, is shown in a refreshed visual style and is not as "rooted" in the city as it is in Baltimore, where systemic, functional, political, and economic issues are interconnected and fundamental to the series' premise, analyzed in the next case study.

3.2. *All the Pieces of the City Matter - Baltimore in The Wire*

In contrast to *CSI*, David Simon's Baltimore and *The Wire* may seem a counter-advocate to the idea of city iconicity. Because of its visual style and camera work, narrative complexity, and the creators' and producers' motivations and choices, I will argue in this case study that despite the level of the in-depth critique of the city by way of the story, production choices, and on-location shooting that has preserved a myriad of details from objects lying on the ground to residents, to actual buildings and their architecture, HBO's 2002 production has itself become iconic, but it does not contribute to the iconicity of Baltimore.

The Wire is a television series that, more than twenty years after its premiere, still garners critical praise and acclaim. The most recent example hails from Twitter, where Stephen King (yet again) endorsed the "tight" writing on the Baltimore-set crime drama (Bohannon). *The Wire* is based on the social and crime dimensions of Baltimore, which David Simon had many opportunities to investigate first-hand. Born in Washington, DC, Simon's interest has always

been in journalism and investigation as he was growing up in Baltimore. Gaining writing experience at a school newspaper, his first full-time job was as a reporter for *The Baltimore Sun*, where he covered crime. As a crime journalist in the 1980s, Simon was allowed to follow the wiretap case of gangster and drug dealer Melvin “Little” Williams. Ed Burns, one of the main detectives on the case, would become Simon’s long-time professional partner and would co-create *The Wire*. At the time, Simon published a series of articles for *The Sun* titled “‘Easy Money’: Anatomy of a Drug Empire” about Williams’s life and the investigation. Having fulfilled his life’s purpose as a reporter, Simon delved deeper into crime coverage, working closely with the police and participating in ride-alongs, which led to his becoming a “police intern” in the late 1980s. In 1991, Simon published a book based on his observations, *Homicide: A Year on the Killing Streets*, describing the inner workings of the department. Baltimore-born director Barry Levinson bought the rights to the book to produce the crime drama series *Homicide: Life on the Street*, broadcast by NBC in 1993. Simon used the opportunity to become a writer on some episodes while learning a new craft of producing for television. Encouraged by his editor, Simon teamed up with Burns again to work on another book, *The Corner: A Year in the Life of an Inner-City Neighborhood* (1997), the basis for the future drama mini-series *The Corner* (2000) for HBO. As Abrams notes, HBO executive Chris Albrecht’s “gamble [on producing *The Corner*] paid off. With Charles ‘Roc’ Dutton directing the six episodes, the miniseries aired in 2000 and received critical acclaim, four Emmy nominations, and a Peabody Award.” Thanks to this positive reception and the industry’s recognition, HBO was interested in making more similar content. Simon pitched his more-rounded idea for *The Wire* (Abrams ch.2).

Ed Burns, *The Wire*’s co-creator, worked at the Baltimore Police Department for twenty years before retiring and becoming a middle and high school teacher. He was part of drug control and homicide units and transferred many of his experiences and observations into stories included in the HBO series (“Ed Burns on Creating ‘The Wire’”). He first cooperated with Simon when the latter approached Burns and his partner to follow the investigation about the drug lord Melvin Williams. Because of the production limitations, Burns could not officially be part of the making of *The Corner*, yet he continued to support Simon and develop ideas that would one day become *The Wire*. For both creators of the 2002 drama series, Baltimore was the center of the stories they wanted to tell. As Burns admits, “[i]t was set up that Baltimore would become a character. In the first season, you saw two institutions, the drug institution and the

police department. The same problems from [the] mayor all the way down” (Abrams ch.2). Moreover, *The Wire*’s characters are amalgamated and iconic references to real-life detectives, criminals, and politicians, with whom Simon and Burns met, worked, and cooperated.

HBO was not in a difficult situation as the broadcasting networks were in the 1990s. The executives had hits in the form of *The Sopranos* and *Sex and the City*, but were convinced to greenlight Simon’s pitch given the success of *The Corner* and his vision for the new project. Former HBO Entertainment president Carolyn Strauss reminisces, “[w]hen we read the story, the document that outlined the first season, that’s when we knew that it would be great. David’s very capable of that kind of story with *The Corner* and *Homicide*. Here, this was just taking all that and really taking that story out” (ch.2). Simon and Burns were joined by producers Nina K. Noble and Robert “Bob” Colesberry, with whom the ex-reporter worked on *The Corner*. Developing the series and needing ideas, support, and expertise, Simon and Burns reached out to their acquaintances and both professionals and inexperienced workers they did not know to involve them in the production, which included police officers hired to play cameo characters, residents to appear as extras or even cameo characters. They approached George Pelecanos and other writers who could expose particular elements of the story envisioned by Simon, and, finally, other mid-level industry workers that offered good advice on both Baltimore settings, like Baltimore-born production designer Vincent Peranio, or German cinematographer Uta Briesewitz, who was an outsider not only to the tough Baltimore environment, but to the American culture (ch.3, ch.4). All contributors have helped to shape *The Wire* and its representation of Baltimore into their final form. Notchimson observes that “Simon seeks complexity through immediacy, connecting his audience to Baltimore through his experiences on its streets as a police reporter and through his collaborators: writers, directors, and actors.” All of them “have had vivid, intense personal connections with what Simon passionately calls ‘my city,’” which is reflected in the attention to detail and factoring of the city (91-92).

Still, the story could hardly be transplanted to another location in the United States, not only because of the creators’ experiences but also thanks to the story’s deep-reaching roots in the society, economics, and politics of Charm City. Director Ernest Dickerson establishes a constructive comparison to the previously analyzed *CSI* when he relates that *The Wire* is

like a novel. You can’t just tune in any time and know what’s going on. You have to pretty much watch it from the beginning...I wasn’t too crazy with the way American

television was going, where you had the hour-long series and the conflict happens and it's totally resolved within an hour. I like the idea that this was a serial, that it was stretched out over time and it gave the characters a lot of time to develop. It felt more like life. That's one of the things I loved about it. Plus, I love the fact that it was shot on the streets of Baltimore and that it was very, very gritty. (Abrams ch.3)

The Wire was “feeling like life.” Actor Brian Anthony Wilson (playing Detective Vernon Holley) observes, “[y]ou normally have set decorations, but we shot in an alley that had actual crack vials there. They weren't put there by Props. It was an alley that had crack vials in it. You didn't have to dress it. I was, ‘Wow, isn't that deep? Life imitating art, and vice versa’” (ch.3).

Shooting on location is another distinctive feature of *The Wire* in regards to the city, as the majority of the scenes have been shot in houses and neighborhoods in Baltimore without much set design. Multiple crew and cast recount the experience as almost surreal. Remembering his wife's emotional reaction when visiting the set one day and mistaking drug-addicted residents for well-prepared extras, actor Andre Royo, who portrayed a drug-using police informant Reginald “Bubbles” Cousins, stresses that “[e]verything is on location, except for the headquarters, the police headquarters. We're on a block, a regular block. It's not dressed. It looks the way it looks because that's the way it looks” (ch.7). Joe Chappelle, who directed a few episodes and was a co-executive producer, echoes the importance of the series' realism by shooting on location. “When David [Simon] and all the writers...would write something and it was on a corner, whatever the street corner was,” says Chappelle, “we would shoot at that corner. It wasn't like we go to [sic] a fun location and put up fake signs. We'd go to that specific corner” (ch.4). Talking about lighting and observing the misuse, abandonment, and disappearance of the characteristic row houses of Baltimore neighborhoods, Peranio simultaneously makes the comparison even more grandiose and beyond the point of no return when he says that *The Wire* “was bleak and beautiful in the way that looking at ruins in a ruined civilization are”—a civilization that cannot be brought back (ch.3).

Released on the paid HBO channel, *The Wire* did not risk being interrupted by commercial breaks. As a result, the runtime of episodes could go up to one hour. Opposed to a television series, it can be categorized as a television serial—to use Butler's distinction—as its subsequent episodes pick up the story when it was left off at the end of the previous ones (58). Although new, secondary storylines may appear and others might close (when a character dies,

for example), *The Wire*'s first whole season is devoted to solving one wiretap investigation into the illicit business of Avon Barksdale⁵⁰ (Wood Harris) and his cohort Stringer Bell (Idris Elba). As the series develops, it follows multiple characters from the police department as well as the drug gang and the victims of drug addiction. Simultaneously, it slowly provides us with bits and pieces of information that we should pick up alongside the detectives.

As we can learn from the first-person accounts of Simon, Burns, Albrecht, Noble and other producers, cast and crew members, *The Wire* was not only unpopular when its first season was on the air, but it was also challenging to watch because of its pacing, serial structure, and complexity of the narrative. It did not use beautiful, attractive imagery; it showed the grittiness and dirtiness of drug trafficking, gun violence, and crime. Not released on a commercial, free-to-air television, the drama, and the paid channel in general, had to entice audiences with their content. Even though, as Simon observes,

[i]t was like the middle of America was hollowed out. The people who were watching the show were either in West Baltimore or North Philadelphia. They were in the places that the show was about, because they couldn't believe there was a drama about their neighborhood. Or it was people who were like book people or whatever who had found it in a weird way, and that's how it felt after two or three seasons. (Abrams ch.3)

Some viewers who watched the show were unsatisfied because of the city's negative portrayal. Others were supportive of the actors and the crew. A cast member, Royo

felt the energy coming back to the city somewhat. It's one of those cities where the architecture is beautiful. It looks different at different angles...It's just that, at one point or at some time, it was a forgotten city...It didn't feel like it was being talked about. Nobody was giving it a look. Now, all of a sudden, it's starting to get a look because *The Wire* was giving it so much attention that we felt the city was starting to care more. They enriched us with us being a part of that. We would walk around; we became these little heroes of Baltimore. We got mad love. It was awesome. (ch.4)

Still on the local level, the responses to the show varied. On the one hand, the officials did not enjoy the show's critical eye towards the city's institutions and feared its potential detrimental effect on tourism. Admittedly, Mayor Martin O'Malley even threatened to revoke the filming

⁵⁰ To avoid confusion because of a few characters surnamed Barksdale, I will use Avon Barksdale's and D'Angelo Barksdale's full name or will refer to them by their first name, for conciseness.

permits. On the other hand, other city workers, like the police, supported the show and made possible ride-alongs for the creators, writers and other production members. On the global scale, interest in the series did not arrive until its second or third season. Only when it was on hiatus between seasons three and four did the fans mobilize to pressure HBO decision-makers to prolong the series (ch.8). The recognition and engagement were low as “[f]ew watched the show when it aired. Award voters mostly ignored it. *The Wire* faced cancellation almost annually” (ch.1). Despite the low audiences and the HBO executives’ failing interest, Simon stayed unrelentless in the pursuit of his passion and goals as a reporter:

That’s the writer’s job. That’s the storyteller’s job. You don’t write for anybody but the story, for yourself and for your idea of what the story is. The moment you start thinking about the audience and the audience’s expectation, you’re lost. You’re just lost. So, you’ve got to just put it out of your mind and tell the story that you think you’re there to tell. (ch.7)

Although the series is quoted as one of the best television dramas ever made, it provided an in-depth analysis thanks to in-person observations by Burns and Simon. Still, it could not achieve a broad audience to display the city to it, not only because of its complexity and slow-paced story development, but also perhaps because of its realist, dark, and gritty visual style and lack of closure at the end of the episodes, which fails to maintain the status quo.

In terms of the visual style, as already mentioned in Chapter 2, the producers decided to film the scenes with a single camera in both environments: the city officials’ and the gangs’ points of view. As some members of the production relate in Abrams’s *All the Pieces Matter*, the episodes mainly were shot on location, with some exceptions where the production did not manage to obtain permissions from the property owners and needed to adjust by either moving to a nearby site, or by becoming owners of a particular site (ch.7). With the very realist, yet controlled, approach to shooting, *The Wire* maintains a focus on its characters and their surroundings: if the camera does not accompany one of the characters, it would turn toward the environment, for example, passers-by, residents sitting at benches, or every-day objects like laundry, which would convey more clues not about the investigation but pertaining to the Baltimore people and neighborhoods. It rarely uses footage that is distanced from the characters. In fact, part of this camerawork seems to be dictated by the economic approach of Simon and Noble, who were “very efficient in the way that we worked by evaluating and questioning every

decision every day in terms of the value to the story. David and I [Nina Noble], when we agree to do something, that's what we do" (ch.8). To see that efficiency, in the form of the emphasis on the story and realism, as well as how the show mobilizes—or not—the city iconicity, let us proceed to the drama's first episode titled "The Target."

Directed by Clark Johnson, the pilot episode begins with a long take (an extreme close-up) on a liquid trail on the hazmat. The police sirens are ringing. It is dark and blue and red lights—we can assume from a police car—are reflecting off of the spilled liquid, which takes on a surreal light blue color of a lightning and a millisecond later turns black with dark red reflections. We quickly connote that it is a blood trail (figure 9). The camera switches the gaze towards the source—a body lying on the ground with a glistening spot on the jacket (figure 10). In the next shot, a detective is crouching to pick up minuscule objects from the ground (figure 11). Demystifying the clues, we can decode that he has just picked up a bullet casing. The fourth shot introduces three children sitting on porch steps (figure 12).

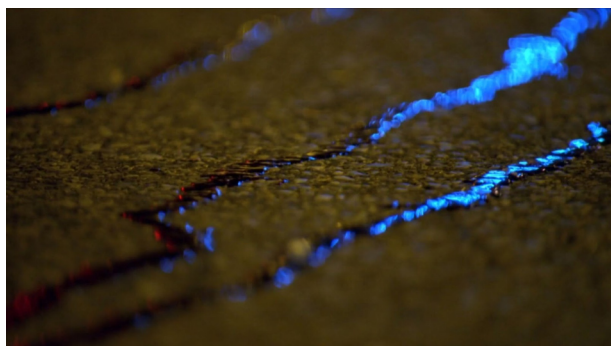


Fig. 9. "The Target." *The Wire*, 00:00:11. The opening shot.



Fig. 10. "The Target." *The Wire*, 00:00:18. The camera shows where the blood comes from.



Fig. 11. "The Target." *The Wire*, 00:00:19. A detective is picking up bullets.



Fig. 12. "The Target." *The Wire*, 00:00:22. Children observing the crime scene.

From the outside of the shot, we hear two voices talking about the victim and his nickname in the streets, Snot Boogie. A detective (we later learn it is McNulty [Dominic West]) is questioning a young man, who seems to have known the victim. Their discussion ends when McNulty asks, “If Snotboogie always stole the money, why’d you let him play?” The witness replies, “Got to. This America, man” (“The Target” 00:02:28-37). During their conversation, the camera shows the men and the scene from different angles. One of the points of view assumes McNulty’s perspective when peeking over his shoulder, turning the viewers into bystanders. It does not rest there for long, however, and moves to the ground level, focusing on the still face of the shot boy lying on the ground, with the detective and the witness in the blurred background. By the overlapping of the camerawork and their conversation, this scene makes us contemplate the last words of the conversation: “[t]his America, man,” which in this case denotes the gun violence, insecurity, and the risk of being shot and killed regardless of age, but also resistance and surviving with whatever one has. This scene is a kind of prologue that foreshadows the complexity, duality, and contradiction that will permeate the story to unfold. Afterwards, the opening sequence follows.



Fig. 13. “The Target.” *The Wire*, 00:00:19. McNulty and a witness’s point of view.



Fig. 14. “The Target.” *The Wire*, 00:00:22. The camera closes up on the victim.

The title sequence lasts exactly ninety seconds (00:02:45-04:15). It is a collage of multiple close-up shots of surveillance equipment (the series’ main theme is the use of a wiretap in a crime investigation), vials and powders used in the process of preparing drugs, fragments of legal documents and police forms, cigarettes being lit, police badges, as well as a few shots from the future episodes (*e.g.* the phone booth near the “Pit”). Only one shot of less than a second is dedicated to the skyline of Baltimore, the series’ main setting (figure 16), which we do not learn about in the first scene, unless one has prior knowledge about HBO’s production. There are also

a couple of long shots of the city space from the episode proper, which seem to assume the first-person perspective (figure 15, for instance, shows the camera located in a car, as if it was in the driver's point of view). It is worth noting that any of the characters are presented in that sequence. Instead, inserted over the above-listed footage, the non-diegetic labels display the names of the cast and creators. In the end, the sequence concludes with a quote that is used in the episode: "...when it's not your turn" by McNulty.



Fig. 15. "The Target." *The Wire*, 00:02:56. An example of on-location street-level shots.

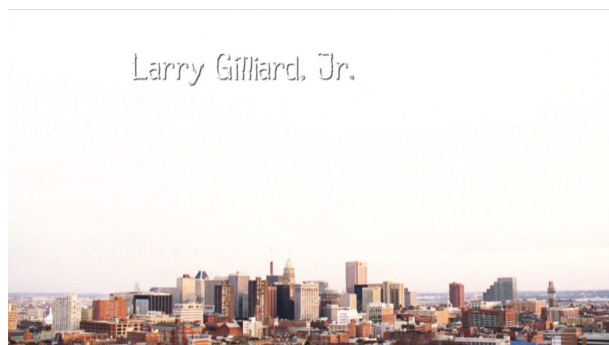


Fig. 16. "The Target." *The Wire*, 00:03:09. The only skyline view in the title sequence.

The story proper begins with detectives James "Jimmy" McNulty and William "Bunk" Moreland (Wendell Pierce) walking into the court building, where D'Angelo Barksdale (Lawrence Gilliard Jr.) is standing trial for murder. He is cleared of the charges by the jury after hearing a (false) witness's testimony. Unsatisfied with the trial result, McNulty reveals to Judge Phelan (Peter Gerety) that organized crime, gun violence, and drug business run rampant in Baltimore, controlled by the Barksdale family, but also shares that the police have done nothing about it. As a result, Phelan contacts police majors from several departments to learn more about the Barksdales and to begin an investigation. Doing the preliminary fact-checking, the detectives conclude that none of the departments have much information or even a photo of the drug lord named Avon Barksdale. By the end of the episode, a special unit commanded by Lieutenant Cedric Daniels (Lance Reddick) is created to work the case.

Simultaneously, as the detail is being established with internal fights between the police divisions about manpower, budget, and equipment, we can glimpse into "the other side" of the city by accompanying two characters (among many others to appear) from the inner city. D'Angelo Barksdale, released from custody after the trial, returns home as well as to drug trafficking. As he needs to retrace his steps up the ladder in the hierarchy, through his character,

we are introduced to low- and high-ranked gangsters, Avon Barksdale and his wingman Stringer Bell included. The second character is a homeless man, Reginald “Bubbles” Cousins (Andre Royo), who suffers from drug addiction. He is the audience’s and the police unit’s facilitator into the crime world of Baltimore thanks to his “street knowledge,” but from yet another perspective on the social and economic challenges in the city—the victim’s. After his friend is beaten by Barksdale’s crew in the “low-rises” for making false paper money, Bubbles decides to be an informant for Kima Greggs (Sonja Sohn), one of the detectives assigned to the investigation.

Over the course of the episode, we are presented with a big ensemble of characters, comprising detectives like McNulty and Moreland, their superiors at the Baltimore Police Department like Major Rawls (John Doman) or the Court of Justice (Judge Phelan), as well as the gangsters—Avon Barksdale, Bell, or fresh in the crime world teenagers Preston “Bodie” Broadus (J. D. Williams) and Wallace (Michael B. Jordan). Initially in the episode, the police occupy their own city space—mainly the court and the police headquarters, except for a buy-bust action shortly after the opening sequence. When buildings are concerned, especially office high-rises in downtown Baltimore, the camera either zooms in on the side of one of the glass-windowed buildings or shows them from a low angle, imitating a pedestrian looking up at the looming headquarters of the BDP. The buildings are crude and do not bear distinctive or unique features that will fall into the viewers’ memory, contrary to many recognizable skyscrapers or monuments in New York City, Washington, Las Vegas, or Chicago.⁵¹ Although Baltimore has a relatively recognizable skyline of its downtown and can boast its industrial past with the old steel mills or factory buildings (like the one with a signature Domino’s Sugars red neon sign), the city does not have any architectural (that is, building) or skyline signature shot in *The Wire*. Ergo, it cannot be metonymically reduced to one of its smaller pieces, like New York City is usually brought down to the Manhattan skyline or the Empire State Building itself. Such singling out and metonymic substitution would contradict the philosophy of David Simon, for whom the world is a constantly shifting web of connections and unpredictable forces (Notchimson 99).

On the other side, the gang and drug addicts reside in the projects and the row houses. These two city dimensions become increasingly entangled in the first episode and beyond. In

⁵¹ Indeed, one of the recognizable symbols of Baltimore and its industrial past is the red-neon Domino Sugars sign located on the eastern side of the harbor. It briefly appears on screen closer to the end of the second episode of the series (“The Detail” 00:34:47).

most cases, the locations are introduced as establishing shots with what seems to be B-roll footage, as well as long shots featuring the characters (figures 17 and 19) or introducing a scene from their point of view. These instances are short, but are strictly related to the following scene. They are also effective, conveying additional information about the building conditions, like well-preserved office buildings (figure 18) as opposed to crumbling row houses, about rituals and in-progress activities, *e.g.*, observing the process of buying the drugs or non-cast residents sitting on the porch (figure 20).



Fig. 17. “The Target.” *The Wire*, 00:09:02. A long shot introducing a new scene, with characters in the shot (in the car.)

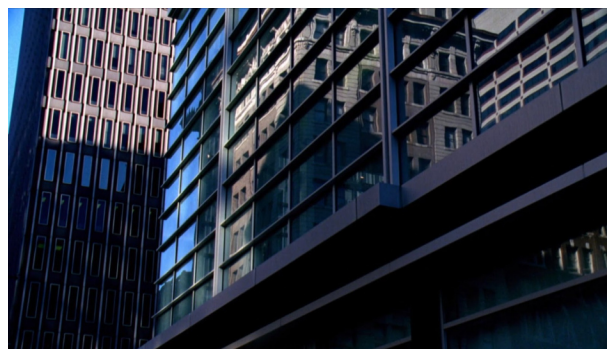


Fig. 18. “The Target.” *The Wire*, 00:14:47. Action shifting to downtown, the establishing shots occasionally show parts of the buildings.



Fig. 19. “The Target.” *The Wire*, 00:33:24. Wallace (Michael B. Jordan) and Poot (Tray Chaney) are entering the Pit and a new scene.



Fig. 20. “The Target.” *The Wire*, 00:35:38. In-between the scenes. The woman is not a character.

“The Target” mobilizes long shots at the end of the scenes, zooming out, as if urging the viewer to see not only the characters but their surroundings—the bigger they get, the more overwhelming and suffocating they appear. However, this tension between the society and the environment is only justifiable if the characters are in the shot; the B-roll footage and “beauty

shots” would not apply effectively in this comparison. For example, figure 21 shows a frame in which the camera lingers after D’Angelo Barksdale and Roland “Wee-Bey” Brice (Hassan Johnson) discuss the gang rules and consequences of revealing information in unsecured places. As they are going to re-enter the car, we can hear approaching police sirens, and Wee-Bey lets the vehicle pass by before stepping off the sidewalk. Because the scene was not cut shorter, the audience has the time to contemplate the conversation and the crime happening in Baltimore at all times. In figure 22, D’Angelo is slowly walking away from a murder scene, where he learned that a new victim found dead was one of the witnesses who had identified him as a shooter in the trial at the beginning of the episode. As he is walking down the street, the camera juxtaposes shots of D’Angelo and the coroner preparing to collect the body. In both instances, there is no music; thus, the audience is left with the sounds of the city and police car signals, and with the image and the knowledge from the previous scenes to make connections and interpret the situation on their own.



Fig. 21. “The Target.” *The Wire*, 00:24:52. Wee-Bey and D’Angelo are coming back to their car after Wee-Bey reminds him not to talk about things which can incriminate D’Angelo.



Fig. 22. “The Target.” *The Wire*, 0058:17. D’Angelo is walking away from the scene where another body was found.

“Beauty shots,” understood as bird’s-eye city shots or time-lapse shots which do not add direct information to the action, are, however, absent in the first episode. The setting change is usually indicated by long shots, and is done effectively within the context of a scene or with a close connection to it, as in the case of moving to the BPD police headquarters. What suffices is a shot, either from a low angle or high angle, that manifestly announces the following setting.

I hope the readers will forgive me for the lengthy description and visualization of the first scene introduced earlier. Yet, I hope it proves what I would like to argue in the case of *The Wire*’s

city iconicity. Or rather, the fact that, even though the drama exposes the crime, violence, corruption, and indifference for personal gains of the people of Baltimore on various societal levels, it mobilizes each shot to provide more visibility to the smallest details and the lowest levels, literally and figuratively. “The Target” avoids extreme long shots of the city and consequently does not mythologize it, nor does it allow the camera to be distanced, or zoomed out, from the lawlessness and brutality the series tries to uncover. In other words, the episode rather shows clues and allows for insights and interpretations from what we see in the scenes; it very sparingly uses footage outside of the takes with characters in them. The episode refuses to apply city-wide shots not to generalize, but also not allow the viewers to metonymically substitute the multiple perspectives and voices in one city symbol. There is nothing “beautiful” in Baltimore. Using them could still be of a specific efficiency to display the passage of time, but a positive, distanced image would also contradict *The Wire*’s premise.

Overall, the episode aims at realism and uses shots of the close environment (*e.g.* the yard in the middle of the low-rises) and objects of ritual and social practices, that is, the objects used by the police (the wiretap, bracelets), the gangs (money and drugs), and the addicted (syringes and money to buy the drugs) to convey the series’–the creators’ and the producers’–intended meanings. In his book *National Identity, Popular Culture and Everyday Life*, Tim Edensor notes that the mundane everyday fixtures and the vernacular that do not stand out are still part of the national identity, thus making a link in this case between the smallest objects showcased in the episode and the epilogue’s commentary of the whole country with “[t]his America, man” (50-51). “The Target” does not treat the characters and places as mass-produced on an assembly line (as in procedural series), but pays attention to the local, to the elements ingrained in the place it shows. Moreover, the producers have refrained from using symbolic and iconic city views, which not only are distanced from its human ensemble but also have the potential to mobilize some additional connotations from the users that could not be on par with those offered by the series. City landmarks and recognizable “spatial attractors often occur in an ensemble of related sites, to constitute ceremonial points of reference” (45). Quoting Johnson, Edensor adds that “they are ‘points of physical and ideological orientation’ often around which ‘circuits of memory’ are organised” (45-46). By avoiding such attractors, it seems that the ideological presumptions are not so much avoided but minimized or redirected.

Consequently, I conclude that the city iconicity in “The Target” is not sustained. The applied city imagery (understood as skyline and aerial shots and famous landmarks) avoids at all costs romanticizing interruptions in the form of “beauty shots.” Not only would they be distanced from particular scenes, but from the narrative in general. The long shots aim to introduce the audience to new characters and settings or to allow them to meditate on the scene. Certainly, not being a procedural series, the future episodes could reveal a different approach to present the city and use its iconic vistas, or even create new ones, for instance, when the second season moves to the Baltimore dock area. Still, setting the visual style and mood for the whole series, the pilot episode does not follow a structure required by the commercial television channels, requiring commercial breaks; thus there exists less need from the scheduling and structural point of view to insert the transitional shots that would attract the viewers and signal to them that the break is over and that they should return to the *séance*.

Finally, it is because the cityscapes are missing that the city iconicity is not maintained. Although the creators and producers have personal experiences and histories related to Baltimore, and the story is deeply anchored in Charm City, the nature of where the series was first distributed, its content and visual style do not support the iconicity. As a result, the audience is not provided with symbolic and widely recognizable images to connote particular, pre-established meanings and to prolong the repetitive chain. The iconicity does not work on the basis of any imagery, but on positive and spectacular imagery on top of that, which the viewers will be enticed to view repeatedly and reproduce in other media. Reaching back to the creators’ journalistic and investigative backgrounds, the episode seems to treat its constituent shots and scenes as hard evidence and facts that the audience is supposed to match to the bigger picture rather than as speculative and distanced images of the city that could be misleading or idealized, with their polysemy and the viewers’ connotations with their prior experiences.

Conclusion

In the twenty-first century, we must learn to look at cities not as skylines but as brandscapes, and at buildings not as objects but as advertisements and destinations. In the experience economy, experience itself has become the product: we're no longer consuming objects but sensations, even lifestyles.

—(Klingmann Architects and Brand Consultants qtd. in Sklair 239)

In this project, I have attempted to expose how the television industry, its executives, creators, and producers as well as their finished televisual work contribute to, maintain, or negate the city's iconicity. Interestingly, both iconicity and television share a few commonalities. They depend on the reception and audiences: the viewers' interest to watch and re-share the content about what is considered iconic or commenting on a television series. Secondly, they can be read in polysemic and contradictory ways: an icon can signify a myriad of things for a person, depending on their background and histories; similarly, a television production may be criticized by some while adored by others. Lastly, both need the repetitive pattern to be maintained: icons have to resurface in cultural and social contexts and discourses not to be forgotten; television shows are often subject to syndication, global distribution and re-runs on commercial television or replays on streaming.

Nevertheless, we have to acknowledge how permeating culture and society are and how powerful iconicity—in this case, city iconicity—can be. We seem to take for granted the access to television, increasingly available on newer streaming platforms and devices, and the omnipresent city imagery on television and social media. Yet, as much as we consciously may consume television, the power of iconicity is camouflaged in attractive photographs, travel “selfies,” and filler footage in cinema and series.

As I have demonstrated in Chapter 1, iconicity is a notion that bears various definitions depending on the many areas of study and cultural fields it has been recognized in. There can be no finite definition of the concept because of the multiplicity of meanings ascribed to it. However, even though analyzed in apparently unrelated areas of linguistics and its visual branch, design, branding, and marketing, architecture, television, and film, I conclude that iconicity is indeed based on wider recognition and use, repetitive application, fast association of symbols and connotations, visual representation of icons, and presupposed and audience-ascribed

meanings. Expressly, television as a medium is a powerful way of establishing and maintaining iconicity for new and existing city-related icons.

Chapter 2 analyzes how the creators and producers in the television industry—in the North American context—approach the importance of representing the city, how the selection process looks, and how the creative, production, and legal choices and constraints reach for and limit the city footage. After introducing television as a medium in broader historical and cultural contexts, I then have briefly presented some of the production and distribution schemas that impact the final series and programs through their specific practices, economic reasons, and philosophies. Television series require three stages of pre-production (planning), production (filming), and post-production (editing, special effects); it is already in the first stages of idea development and planning where the setting and the general style of the show are considered. With the audiences' freedom to decode the television language according to personal experiences (for instance, where they live) and previously consumed content, the series and the city will be subject to potentially countless readings and approaches. Since television is a visual medium, the visual style and camerawork of a program are highly important in how the city is portrayed and what connotations they mobilize.

As showcased in Chapter 3's two case studies of the pilot episodes for *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* and *The Wire*, they differ not only in terms of who created and produced them, or where they are distributed and what critical acclaim they have received. Moreover, I have not intended to compare these two shows to conclude whether one is better in any regard. What is important for this conclusion lies in the acknowledgement that they contribute to the city iconicity in distinctive ways, commencing at the stage of the idea conception and development. *CSI*, the commercial television crime drama procedural set in Las Vegas, repeats and reestablishes the city's vivid, entertainment-focused imagery. *The Wire*, located in post-industrial Baltimore, does not seem to have as much televisual or pop-cultural history as Nevada's city to reuse known city landmarks and locations, nor does it try to establish that, discarding aesthetic aerial views and images to the advantage of more contemplative or detailed shots.

Finally, city iconicity requires visibility. "Beauty shots" like skyline or bird's-eye shots featuring city icons are less functional than they are visually-pleasing and attractive. They introduce spectacular views and sustain the repetition. Additionally, their placement in the television productions depends on who creates the show, how it is made, and where it is

distributed. City iconicity does not thrive in more critical and challenging environments where the status quo is unbalanced, and where the visual representation of the urban iconic views and landmarks is limited. When the polysemy of the icon could disturb the presumed reading of a show or introduce undesired distance from the premise, city icons are avoided. Although city iconicity requires the spectators to mobilize their memory and experiences, it seems to work on a superficial, visual level to suscite their emotions and recollections, very much used in marketing, advertisement, branding, and architecture. When television ventures into a deeper critique and analysis, it cannot use iconic imagery or distanced city views because their quick connotative and metonymic power and superficiality hinder the thought-provoking process. The bigger the power of iconic images, the faster the engagement, and the smaller the possibility for contemplation, in-depth analysis, and constructive critique.

Paths for Further Research

By hereby presenting the thesis linking city iconicity to television industry and crime shows, and two case studies analyzed in more depth, supported by examples going beyond the two crime series, my intent is to open a discussion about how the indispensable yet seemingly secondary choice of the city as the setting location and the subsequent choices related to style, scheduling, storyline, and engagement with the audience participate in the broader context of city iconicity. Starting with only two episodes, I have encountered many names of shows, examples of older series and the brand new alike, which repeat, modify and finally innovate how crime series, and narrative television programs in general, have developed. I have already observed that, when the city-focused footage is concerned, it goes on par with technological developments that enable our global society to become more image-focused in daily communication: social media, screens and touch panels in public places, emojis, AI-rendered photographs that no longer have to be taken in a real place. Although with a risk of suscitating emotions and meanings that are not exactly matching the intention of the author/producer/messenger, we have been getting used to more, better-quality, and reality-warping images (Instagram and different trends and hashtags around this platform is only one of the examples). Television had to catch up. Or rather, has been catching up. In the fight for audiences, television shows have to be attractive and producers need to find newer ways to make their programs so.

One of the ways is surely experimentation with visual styles. With more series reaching global markets, by way of syndication or licenses on streaming platforms, production companies for broadcast networks, cable television, and streaming services have an opportunity to promote respective cities and locations—especially if it will bring profits from tourism. Considering police dramas, they are mostly shot on location, which needs approval from the city officials. Why would city halls decline such opportunities? Besides spending a fortune on marketing and city branding, the city might be lucky enough and be *the* setting location of a successful television series, which would invite the show's fans-turned-tourists to visit the location.

It is not thanks only to *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* or *The Wire* that people would like to visit Las Vegas or Baltimore. On the contrary, television shows are only constituents—yet very important ones—in the complex process of creating icons, maintaining those icons, and persuading viewers—be it by the visual style, characters, narrative and so on—to remember and even visit a place. To take an example from cinema, the *Rocky* films have helped to promote and

mythologize Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, across several decades. The city is featured in each of the six films where the protagonist Rocky Balboa lives, trains, wins, and loses, but it is via his character and the story arc that we as viewers can metonymically associate to Philadelphia the values that his screen life transmits. But there have been other films and television shows set in Philadelphia and other American cities. Each of them adds a piece of a bigger puzzle, and will shift in meaning depending on the project itself, time of production, audience, visual style, political environment, social changes...the list goes on. At the same time, in this ever-changing process since the birth of television around a hundred years ago, one of the constants is the city. Paradoxically, cities like New York City or Los Angeles are fixed locations and will not move on the map, but each of their representations will add a pixel to the iconic image of each of them, a collage constantly in the making.

Iconicity plays with symbols and meanings, time and space, production and reception of what can and is considered as icons. Analyzing the two episodes thus shows only two “pixels” in the digital image of Las Vegas and Baltimore but it is by any means encompassing. The examples are plentiful and at hand for us to reach out for.⁵² However, thanks to this project, I have started to add more questions on the side note that yet need to be answered: how has the visual representation of the city in crime shows changed over the decades, and why? Was it only technological developments that propelled more city imagery that seems more tourism-focused than story-related? Filmed on locations which are supposed to bring more realism, more contemporary series have less documentary-like style (like *Homicide: Life on the Streets*) which potentially could render some procedural shows as less realistic but work differently toward iconicity; how does it work? Which cities have been prevalent in crime shows and does it reflect crime issues the respective locations have been struggling with? Some cop shows from the 1960s through 1980s have merited their remakes in the last two decades: *Magnum P.I.* (2018-2023) and *Hawaii 5-0*, for instance. The latter’s 2010 version not only reboots the series but copies its predecessor. Has the city representation changed and what could be the possible reasons for it?

⁵² *Chicago PD* crime drama procedural is another example “at hand.” The establishing shots or transition shots using city-only imagery is limited, if absent at all, to maintain a more documentary-like visual style, which is maintained by a hand-held camerawork. The establishing shots are often street-level based, introducing the characters without transition sequences.. There is no embellishment. Yet, the background, many a time, will feature the Sears Tower looming above downtown Chicago in the distance. Curiously, at the very beginning of the series, when Sergeant Voight threatens one of the criminals and, standing over him, says “stay out of my city,” the camera pans out to a long shot to show Chicago’s skyline. The iconicity and symbolism in this shot show Voight standing on the watch between the city behind him which he has to protect and the lying on the ground criminal—signifying crime in general—to eliminate those who do not abide by the law (“Stepping Stone” 00:01:35-47).

How does the reboot/remake actualize the city and what is happening there? Some changes seem drastic. In the newer version, the episode opens with a cold start set in South Korea. After the opening credits, the first scene opens with a sequence of aerial views of the Oahu Island and takes place at the Pearl Harbor Memorial (after a cold start set in South Korea), where Commander McGarrett meets with the governor of Hawaii (“Pilot” [*Hawaii 5-0*] 00:05:38-08:22). In the original series’ opening scene, we are introduced to a big laboratory-like, claustrophobic room with a big tank where a murder scene is revealed (“Cocoon” 00:00:00-03:26). It is followed by the opening sequence after which the original McGarrett is arriving at the police headquarters. By way of a note, the police building and its historical reference is explained by a guide to a bus-full of tourists. In this way, the viewers become like those tourists who are going to sightsee the island, later following the steps of McGarrett (00:04:58-06:20). In the newer version, McGarrett arrives at the island after a few years of working abroad—his making new connections and remembering old things and places is a way of helping the audience “sightsee” the islands. Moreover, his partner on the governor-appointed task force, Daniel Williams (Scott Caan), is called a *haole* (stranger) by the locals because he is not aware of social rules and cultural references, and which he learns in the future episodes. Considering the majority of viewers are located outside of Hawaii, shifting the story to the perspective of an outsider (to an extent, at least) is a very interesting and important technique. Since these two series are very much close thematically, it seems more than relevant to observe how the production practices, available technology, and shifts around the television market have changed. Opening the door towards the historical comparison, in the context of this project, one could compare *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* and *The Wire* with their immediate successors: *CSI: Vegas* and *We Own This City* (2022), for which the pages of this dissertation have not had enough space.

Going beyond police procedurals and series, what can we learn (if anything at all) about the real locations from fictional television series? Why do some of them, like *Chicago Fire*, change names of existing physical locations while others, like *CSI: New York* do not? Do all espionage and political series take place in Washington DC because of necessity or easy choice for the production? Historically, which cities started to emerge in television at specific points in time—and what were the choices for it? What are the areas of the United States that are underrepresented, and does it transpire from social, political, or economic reasons?

With all these questions above, perhaps some of them have already been investigated and answered in a research that I yet have to encounter. As a photography enthusiast, television and cinema amateur, and a city-bound traveler, I am simply excited about all the mysteries involved. As a student of English and American studies hoping for a future in academic research, I am aware of the need for an organized analysis, a choice of methodology, and a focused approach. Expanding the main topic of this project, it could develop into a chronological analysis of American crime series and the city representation and iconicity across decades in the search for an answer how the visual style has changed across the years and what challenges to the genre new ways of watching might pose. If *CSI* offered a unique for its time visual style to reconstruct the crime scenes and involve the audience actively, Netflix could one day create an interactive life-action crime drama. Who knows which city they would choose and why?

Finally, going beyond the area of crime and police television shows, there is a myriad of series and serials belonging to various genres that are commissioned, launched, and discontinued each season. On top of that, streaming platforms seem to pay even less heed to the concept of season as the episode-per-week run from around September until April, and release their productions according to their own schedules. Audiences create their own content, production companies provide companions of various kinds revolving around their television series and programs to keep the viewers engaged. Numbers of social media influencers, photographers, and videographers promoting experiences and creating tourism-boosting content is almost overwhelming. Documentaries like *Aerial America* (2010-) endorse aerial footage of locations while the narrator tells us the historical facts and trivia about cities, towns, and remote American locations alike. YouTube channels like Nomadic Ambience record city (and not only) walk videos, without plotlines or characters. Even if recorded as a hobby, meditation, or exercise, it still requires commitment related to editing and publishing the videos. Musicians have for a while been producing music videos which pronounce their belonging to particular cities or simply record their iconic landmarks as the video's backdrop. There are many more examples that marry television and the city. All of them are different aspects of the broader television medium and industry that will in one way or another refer to a story of a city and add its own perspective. I hope there are more researchers and curious academics as well as students who are willing to choose one of the paths suggested above and thread some of them to find more answers and even more questions.

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