

UNDERSTANDING AND DOCUMENTING THE TRANSFORMATIONS OF TELEVISION TEXTS IN THE STREAMING ERA – PART ONE

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Editorial



Video 1. Intro of *The Leftover*, Season 2 (Source: YouTube).

1 Transformation

Transformation begins when the old story no longer explains who we are, and we find ourselves needing to live inside a new one, and to make some sense of it. In the HBO series *The Leftovers* (Damon Lindelof and Tom Perrotta, 2014-2017), characters face such a situation. They are forced to navigate a reality where familiar rules have vanished, leaving them to create new ways to make sense of the “after”. While the stakes of media research are certainly more grounded, this image of an irrevocably altered landscape, and the necessary transformations, captures television’s recent trajectory. Over the past three decades, the transition from traditional linear broadcasting to video-on-demand (VoD) has been much more than a predictable technological update – it has fundamentally reconfigured the televisual text itself.

Understanding a medium amid such transformation demands an active conversation that crosses traditional academic boundaries. Driven by the need for this interdisciplinary dialogue, the two Film Studies and Television Studies sections of ECREA – European Communication Research and Education Association – exceptionally joined forces to organize the conference, “Film and Television’s Transformations in the Streaming Era”, bringing more than one hundred international researchers together at the University of Bologna (Italy) in early September 2025. As conversations unfolded during the two days, a consensus seemed to emerge: while we frequently discuss streaming as a global phenomenon, often reducing it to the strategies of dominant and global platforms as Netflix, the actual experience of streaming in Europe is far more complex. Across different national and temporal contexts, we encounter a fractured landscape of local platforms, regional idiosyncrasies, and short-lived media ventures. While the evolving markets, industries, technologies, and audiences have been at the centre of the analysis on audiovisual platforms, the cultural and textual dimensions of these transformations have sometimes been overlooked.

This special issue of *VIEW* is an attempt to bridge that gap, returning our focus to the televisual text, to its formal and narrative dimensions, as it exists in a renewed on-demand environment. Doing so also requires us to also ask ourselves practical – and at times disorienting – questions about how we conduct our research on a changed scenario.

- What constitutes the televisual text in the streaming era?
- What are the main traits of innovation and change, and what are the continuities?
- In which ways are the borders of genres and formats restructured or redefined?
- How can we access, examine and study the televisual text(s)?
- Whose stories are we telling when we examine the transformations brought about by on demand platforms and services?
- How can we trace in streaming texts what has changed?

To capture this shifting landscape, we believe that traditional academic formats must also transform. Therefore, this collection is deliberately varied and multi-faceted in its approach. Alongside full-length research articles, we have included shorter, tightly focused ‘enthusiasms’ that examine specific texts and platforms. Together, these contributions do more than just document the transformation of European television; they offer a reflection on the creative and methodological paths required to study a medium that refuses to sit still.

2 Forms and Genres: Expansions, Reworkings and Continuities

How are the borders of genre changed and redefined in the contemporary on demand television scenario, where innovation adds to long-lasting models and formats? A wide set of articles and enthusiasms in this special issue address this topic and can be read both as a multifaceted range of national and transnational case histories and as a deeper understanding of sudden trends and slow changes.

Erine Pioffret's enthusiasm looks at the transformation of the **period drama** genre using the case of the Netflix exclusive film *Persuasion* (2022). What can adaptations of stories from the past tell us about our present? The made-for-streaming film, she argues, is not only yet another adaptation of a Jane Austen novel to contemporary audiences and media but builds on the aesthetic and narrative codes that Netflix has itself fostered and promoted with its hit series *Bridgerton* and its ensuing social media hype. Traits of the adaptation that reveal something about the transformation of audiovisual texts through streaming include elements of seriality even in a feature-length film, contemporary accessibility in language and narration, performed proximity to the viewers, e.g. in glances to the camera as a visual translation of irony in dialogue, and a colour-blind casting that can be seen to embody the platform's political allegiance to progressive values, minus the actual engagement with Europe's colonial past. In its reworking on the period drama genre, Pioffret argues, "Netflix redefines what is culturally associated with the Regency era," proliferating the platform's own construction of "cultural authenticity" in a transnational context. Expanding the reflection on how classic genres change under streaming conditions, Matthew Hilborn analyses the Spanish Netflix original **romantic serial** *Todas las veces que nos enamoram* (2023). His article discusses how prolonged serialisation prevalent in subscription video-on-demand offers induces narrative fatigue and fuels hetero-pessimism in romantic serials. With a study of the narrative structure, Hilborn argues that the endless plot delays demanded by these platforms ultimately drain the romantic fantasy rather than sustain it.

Changes tied to streaming are impacting on fully established serial genres, expanding some of their classic traits while providing different routes of expansion. This is surely the case of the main staple of Brazilian never-ending serial narratives, the **telenovela**. In the article by Bruna Aucar and Tatiana Siciliano, the focus on *Beleza Fatal* (2025), the first original series produced by HBO Max for Brazil, helps to examine the transformation of Brazilian melodrama by streaming platforms. Historically, this genre has been a central cultural form in Brazil, combining passionate narrative, social commentary and emotional engagement to shape audience habits and national identity. Through interviews with professionals involved in the writing and production of the series, the authors analyse how *Beleza Fatal* adapts the traditional structure to the different logics of digital consumption. Alongside classic elements such as revenge, family conflict, moral polarisation and emotional excess, the series introduces faster pacing, stronger cliffhangers and a forty-episode format designed for binge-watching. Streaming changes both narrative rhythms and aesthetics, with darker cinematography, cinematic close-ups and a "prestige television" style that appeals to international viewers while maintaining recognisable Brazilian melodramatic codes. In a glocalisation process involving new paths and a strong dependence on global players, telenovelas remain resilient and adaptable, also showing that streaming platforms create at the same time opportunities for experimentation and international visibility, and inequalities.

The article by Chiara Roccatello focuses on **adult animation** across Europe, reconstructing the development of this format in the last decades, and the result of the experimentations by both mainstream broadcasters and streaming platforms. Adult animation has long struggled against a persistent prejudice that the genre is inherently a children's medium, so broadcasters in Britain, France, and Italy had to negotiate between target audiences, editorial strategies, and narrative structures. A major transformation occurred thanks to Netflix's *BoJack Horseman* (2014-2020). In the new streaming context, animated series increasingly centred on psychologically complex characters, cumulative narrative structures, and topics as identity crises, alienation, and emotional instability. Through cases such as the French *Lastman* (2016-2022) and the Italian *Adrian* (2019), platforms have legitimised adult animation as a culturally significant form, particularly by addressing generational anxieties and by shifting narrative focus from episodic comedy toward character-centred drama.

Streaming platforms are stretching the boundaries of television genres and models, and so are cultural changes that have modified the contemporary media systems. Building on another classic and successful genre, crime series, Diletta Cenni and Matteo Marinello explore in their enthusiasm how contemporary television series increasingly incorporate podcasting into their narratives, particularly through crime stories centred on **fictional true crime** hosts and argue that it has become a powerful narrative device because of its close association with true crime culture and its growing mainstream visibility in a platform-driven media systems. In *Based on a True Story* (2023-2024), podcasting is represented as a specifically US cultural obsession, satirising the ethics of true crime by showing how

violence, victimhood, and serialisation are transformed into profitable products. *Bodkin* (2024), instead, stages a conflict between US podcast culture and European journalistic traditions through the collaboration between an American podcaster and an Irish reporter: podcasting becomes a symbol of the tension between storytelling and factual truth. A third series, *Costanza* (2025-), demonstrates how the US true crime podcaster model is adapted in Italian public service television: the lead uses podcasts to reconstruct forgotten female histories from medieval past, transforming academic research into accessible storytelling. This article shows how television still plays a central reflexive role in negotiating the meaning of emerging media forms: by integrating podcasting into familiar serial structures, it domesticates and legitimises an innovative format within broader national media cultures (and their audiences).

A final line of inquiry in the renewed relationship between television genre and streaming platforms addresses unscripted shows. In their piece, María José Higuera-Ruiz and Santiago Lomas-Martínez document how the Spanish digital channel Canal Quikie adapted traditional **celebrity gossip television** into an innovative, hybrid model that is capable to bridge linear broadcasting with live streaming digital platforms like Twitch. The authors refer to this project as a critical experiment in blending legacy entertainment formats with the interactive, multi-platform distribution of the digital scenario. Sport is another crucial genre for television, often approached through its liveness and its ability to bring a (national) public together around a shared event, but, as Paolo Carelli reminds us in his enthusiasm, the representation of sport in other genres has received less attention from television scholars. His contribution focuses on the **sports documentary** and how it has transformed in the Italian context: identifying the arrival of pay TV in the 1990s as a key turning point, Carelli shows how dramatisation and storytelling entered the Italian sports documentary way before streaming; yet, the streaming era increased the volume of sports docs across platforms like Rai, Dmax, Sky and Netflix, differentiated them into more sub-genres and repositioned the use of memory in them. As Carelli argues based on his analysis of the televisual texts and interviews with creatives involved, both *Scugnizzi per sempre* (2023) and *Generazione di fenomeni* (2024) drew inspiration from Netflix's *The Last Dance* (2020) with its storytelling driven by individual characters. Moreover, the embedding of archive material "activates a form of collective memory that extends beyond sporting events to encompass society in a historical period." The sports documentary, renewed through inspiration from global streaming, enables public service broadcasters to enact their role as mediators of national culture.

3 Forms and Contexts: Streaming Services and Platforms

Whose story are we telling when we seek to retrace the transformation of the televisual text over the past decades? Our understanding of the transformation of televisual texts on streaming is often shaped by the platforms we study. Many enthusiasms and articles in this special issue pay close attention to the practices prevalent on individual platforms and their differences. Ellenrose Firth and Alberto Marinelli open the enthusiasm section of this special issue, challenging us to rethink "flow" through the remediation of television on **TikTok**. Through an empirical analysis conducted in 2025, the researchers observed how TV-related content rapidly dominated the "For You" page after a few targeted searches, demonstrating the platform's strong responsiveness. Most of the television-related videos were produced by users rather than official accounts, and the formats included fan edits, clips, meme carousels, personal commentary videos, with practices resembling earlier fandom cultures on Tumblr or YouTube. Firth and Marinelli then focus on the TikTok strategy of Netflix Italia, showing how the company adapts its promotional content to grassroots platform conventions by publishing clips, behind-the-scenes material, and short promotional videos that imitate user-generated aesthetics while maintaining a professional editorial style.

Globally operating services, particularly, **Netflix**, tend to dominate accounts of streaming transformations, but instead of providing a unified story, the authors in this collection show us that the strategies and the impact of the global streamers is highly varied depending on where you look. Netflix remediates collective memories and identities, be it

those of the Azores in *Rabo de Peixe* (2023-2026) or the British monarchy in *The Crown* (2016-2013). Gabriela Orestes' account of the Portuguese true crime series reveals how Azorean identity is selectively mobilized to balance cultural authenticity with transnational legibility, generating a tension between celebration by the national audiovisual industry and local community resistance. Janet McCabe draws attention to the remediation of British television's history in the *The Crown*, which positions Netflix as a maker of (television) memory, in a sense succeeding the BBC that built its foundation as the maker of cultural memory on the live broadcast of Queen Elizabeth's coronation. McCabe approaches the subject through media archaeology and memory studies with a focus not on historical fidelity but on TV's materiality and how it is transformed in the streaming era. Drawing attention to the manufacturing of *The Crown's* own "archival" footage and its remediation of defining moments of British and international broadcast television, the article invites us to think about how Netflix in particular but also streaming in general forms the conditions under which history and television's role in it can be known.

The influence of the global streaming platforms, however, is neither uniform nor a one-way street. In their dominant promotional narratives, during the 2010s globally operating services have established themselves as providers of "prestige drama". Using Netflix Italia's adaptation of the historical novel *Il Gattopardo* (2025) as a case study, Marta Boni examines some contradictions in current streaming culture, where audiences increasingly experience fatigue, boredom, and mild dissatisfaction despite the abundance of expensive, prestigious productions. The early excitement surrounding streaming services and "quality television" has shifted toward more casual, low-intensity viewing practices, shaped by algorithmic abundance and choice fatigue. Drawing on Raymond Williams's concept of "structure of feeling", the article describes productions relying on heritage values, lavish aesthetics, and respectable storytelling while avoiding risk, complexity, or strong impact. Considering the context of content acquisition, Paola Brembilla reminds us that the "disruption" brought about by streaming is to a large part rhetoric and often a re-branding of content originating firmly from within televisual traditions. Streaming services often acquire, rebrand, and redistribute pre-existing broadcast titles instead of creating entirely new forms. In Italy, services as Netflix, Disney+, and Prime Video host successful **Rai** and **Mediaset** titles as *Mare Fuori* (2020-), *Don Matteo* (2000-), and *I Cesaroni* (2006-), transforming them into on-demand products aimed at younger, digitally oriented audiences, with benefits on both sides: platforms gain cultural legitimacy and local anchoring, while broadcasters extend the life cycle and visibility of their series.

Continuing the investigation of industrial relationships between local broadcasters and global streamers, Andrew Spicer's article looks at what happens when public service and global streamer strategies converge in co-commissioned dramas. Looking at key examples of the **BBC** co-commissioning with Netflix (*Dracula*, 2020), Amazon Prime Video (*A Very English Scandal*, 2018) and Disney+ (*Doctor Who*, 2023-2025), the author examines how the televisual texts reflect both the streamers' different priorities and the BBC's own strategic approaches to them. The match between Netflix and BBC enables a transformation of aesthetic qualities in TV that amplifies the BBC's own drama traditions, while highlighting the eventually fraught collaboration with Disney+, built on an existing valuable fan base, and Prime's eclectic approach to partnerships in different genres and topics. The article thereby challenges both monolithic views on global streamer strategies as well as one-sided critiques of collaborations between public service broadcasters and global VoD services. Also interested in co-production, Aysegül Kesirli traces the transformation of streaming through the transnational mobility of **Turkish actors** in increasingly globally circulating local drama "*dizi*". By focusing on the transnational roles of Öykü Karayel and Haluk Bilginer, she explores how acting choices and character construction adapt to international co-productions. The study demonstrates that national identity remains a pivotal force that shapes actors' performances and character construction, even in transnational production contexts.

With the case of the Danish commercial public service broadcaster **TV 2 Play**, Hanne Bruun reminds us that local services are strong and distinct competitors to the global services particularly through their local content. Combining an analysis of strategy documents, interviews with managerial staff and an analysis of three programmes, Bruun examines TV 2's content commissioning strategy that aims for broad reach and societal impact. Through her analysis of the format adaptations *The Traitors* (2023-) and *Race across the World* (2020-), together with the documentary series *Den Sorte Svane* (2024-2025), Bruun distinguishes the "embedded diversity" strategy in the former two from the "megaphone" approach in the latter. Her article also invites us to think about the constitutes of the televisual text in

the streaming era and our possible modes of access to them. Focusing also on the distinctiveness of local streamer approaches, Anders Marklund examines what Swedish streamer **Viaplay**'s ultimate failure on the international plane tells us about the differences between global and European approaches to streaming. Viaplay embarked in the early 2020s on a mission to become "Europe's challenger to Netflix" with an ambitious transnational expansion that even included the USA. By 2024 this endeavour had come to a dramatic end with the company shares crashing and the streamer being acquired by Canal+. Comparing selected Swedish Viaplay originals aimed at teen and young adult audiences (*Thunder in my heart*, 2021-, and *Threesome*, 2021-2023) to Swedish Netflix productions (*Young Royals*, 2021-2024, and *Barracuda Queens*, 2023-2026), Marklund argues that Viaplay indeed aimed to offer a distinct, perhaps a Nordic, take with more emphasis on social and cultural authenticity over strategic universalization.

4 Continuing Transformations and Conversations

Taken together, the contributions to this special issue reveal not a single narrative of transformation, but a dense constellation of themes, tensions, and trajectories through which to explore the impact of global streaming services on transnational texts in the contemporary televisual landscape. Questions of disruption and continuity, local, national and global dynamics, industrial strategies and textual innovation, audience identities and methodological challenges intersect throughout the special issue, in the full articles as well as in the enthusiasms section, inviting readers to move across multiple analytical perspectives rather than seeking definitive answers. This plurality reflects the complexity of the streaming era itself, where the televisual text is constantly reshaped by competing forces and evolving contexts.

Transformation is an unstable, uncertain and continuous process. The conversation initiated in this special issue remains deliberately open, and many of these topics will be further developed in a second instalment, to be published in the next issue of *VIEW*, where other relevant contributions will expand and complicate this picture.