

## Serial Narratives and Viewing Demands I

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Serialization and Space: An introductory discussion on why and how narrative space matters

Since its advent, society has marveled at television's ability to bring the world into the living room. "Television" literally means sight (*vision*) at a distance (*tele-*). Through the television set, physical space could no longer constrain people's access to cultural experiences; it is the "window to the world." Time, however, still could constrain these experiences. During the multi-channel transition television began tinkering with lived time, shifting it along its linear path, even extracting certain experiences and placing them in a time capsule (DVR). Nevertheless, television, and thus the consumption of televisual narratives, was still subject to the logic of time. Throughout years of reincarnation and innovation, the serial narrative has secured its role as the token televisual form.

While serialization remains a dominant and compelling form for television narratives, the rise of online television consumption in the context of computer culture brings to light the major determining force behind the affects and effects of serialized narratives: time. The richness of control—for both producers and consumers—that computer culture allows reveals not only the constraint of unidirectional television distribution, but also of unidirectional *storylines*. Television and television culture give narratives a time—narratives are in this sense temporalized. The Internet and computer culture give narratives a space; they are spatialized. Time is experienced as a fixed, pre-determined, forward motion; serialized television narratives are thus produced—and viewed—according to the logic of time. It is conceivable, then, that anxiety that develops for the viewers may be understood to stem from the struggle to master time, to successfully wield it for our own economic and emotional gratification. Serialization, in this sense, cultivates not only a desire, but also creates a pre-conceived vacancy in a storyline that viewers are, quite literally, powerless to fill. Instead, viewers are dependent on how the television network schedules its time.

That with new media technology, various clips, episodes, and seasons of a narrative can simultaneously exist in the same moment of time in the same space (ex. Netflix or Hulu), signals the flattening out of a linear storyline into a nonlinear *storyplane*. Space is not unidirectional; space has no native motion or trajectory. On the contrary, to wield space for economic or emotional gratification requires intentional manipulation and navigation. Producers aim to manipulate space to attract and keep consumers. Consumers navigate space to fulfill desires and, one could argue, diminish the anxieties brought on by "waiting" for time. This is not to say, however, that the spatialized televisual serial narrative evades these effects of serialization. It is my opinion, in fact, that the drive to master space will bare a more individual, personal set of desires and anxieties, seeing as navigating space asks much more of the consumer than waiting for time. How these desires and anxieties manifest themselves will be of great interest in the struggle to master *space* for emotional and economic gratification.

In the coming years, how television reconciles spatialization and temporalization will have significant ramifications on the meaning, purpose, and impact of serialization. If the

television industry continues to produce programming designed for temporalization, then the space provided by new media technology is rendered as storage. To take for granted that the best new media technology has to offer the serial narrative is storage is to take *television* for granted—to discount innovation. Getting consumers to engage with a serial narrative has become a multi-faceted affair; one in which time can easily be a hindrance. Perhaps, in this sense, the most regrettable future for television, or specifically, for the serial narrative, is one that or wastes space.