Research Article

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Series Under Threat

Abstract: Lockdown has given us an occasion to discover new television series and to revisit others. TV series accompany us in our ordinary lives, but they can also be a resource or refuge in extraordinary situations. As the enduring success of *Friends* proves, they provide us with universes of comfort. TV series provide strong common cultural referents, which populate both ordinary conversations and political debates. TV series, by virtue of their aesthetic format (their duration, weekly and seasonal regularity, and the fact that they are, or were until recently, usually viewed in the context of the home), the attachment they inspire to their characters, the democratization and diversification of modes of viewing them (internet, streaming, discussion forums), make possible a specific form of education and constitution of a public. TV shows are hence a medium for political and ethical discussion. The article studies two series, *Homeland* and *The Bureau*, which are paradigmatic examples of a genre that has grown exponentially since the beginning of the century, and which we refer to as the "security series" genre. These series are great works of art and can also be seen as powerful tools for educating and informing the public.

1 Introduction

Lockdown gave us an occasion to discover new television series and to revisit others. TV series accompany us in our ordinary lives, but they can also be a resource or refuge in extraordinary situations. As the success of *Friends* proves, they provide us with universes of comfort, full of things that now seem like distant memories: enduring worlds in which people go to the coffee shop, travel, touch each other. They allow us to see both the value and charm of an everyday life we might take for granted – and that we might seek to escape by immersing ourselves in more or less exotic professional worlds: the worlds of cops, undertakers, millionaires, or spies. They have offered us continuity through the ruptures and upheavals of these past months, keeping us connected to characters whose return we await, like those on *This Is Us* – and the somewhat less lovable ones on *Succession* – and those we got to see again for the last time during lockdown: those on *Homeland* and *The Bureau*.

 In this article, I follow earlier themes from my work on film and on TV series,[1] inspired by Stanley Cavell, and on the power of the experience of popular culture, in order to connect these themes to the place of cultural data in our lives – specifically with regard to the genre I refer to as "security series." The question of the relevance and importance of series is not "only" aesthetic, or sociological, or communicative. It is, rather, the question of how the presence of these images and givens (a very wide-ranging presence, because there are now series in all countries and they circulate far beyond their countries of origin) change not only

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1 See Laugier, "Popular Cultures, Ordinary Criticism;" Laugier, "Spoilers, Twists, and Dragons;" and Laugier, "The Conception of Film."

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our visions of the world but the world itself. Series produce the given of what we may call *elementary forms of shared experience*, and security series provide a particularly exciting demonstration of the power of TV series; of the grip reality has on them, and their grip – the grip of cultural data – on reality.

Stanley Cavell's work on cinema, written at a time when American comedies – the remarriage comedies he studied in his book *Pursuits of Happiness* or the melodramas to which he later devoted *Contested Tears* – were not immediately taken entirely seriously. These films, sometimes referred to as screwball comedies and tearjerkers, respectively, were considered popular, commercial objects, devoid of cultural relevance and legitimacy – and their gendered nature led to them being devalued even more. The genius of *Pursuits of Happiness* is Cavell's method, which consists in taking these comedies seriously, not as objects offered to the intelligence of the philosopher (who would use them as examples to expose hidden mechanisms that might have escaped the director but not the philosopher), but rather in order to show the intelligence inherent in the material itself, the intelligence brought by a film to its own realization. Very often, philosophy maintains that the genius of a work of art, especially a popular work, is only discovered through analyzing it. Cavell showed both that Hollywood comedies were great works of art and that they had an intrinsic philosophical purpose.

To grasp the importance of popular culture requires an ordinary approach to philosophy and a particular conception of morality. We conventionally conceive of morality as a set of general rules, of principles to be put into action. Popular culture completely shifts such conceptions, demonstrating that literary and cinematographic works or television series have a strong ethical dimension and provide a form of moral education to the public.[2] The ordinary virtues of these works consist in showing that morality is to be found not in examples or general rules, but rather in fictional characters facing ordinary situations – situations in which, as in life, it is a matter of ethical problems that are always specific and particular. Thus, the moral dimension elaborated by popular culture moves away from an ethics of duty, from grand universal principles that would apply in the same way to all. Ethics are not necessarily to be found in judgment and action alone, but also in the way people are, or in the way a character is presented. The long-term attachments viewers form to characters from series or even films stem from such particular characteristics, which are not usually considered part of the field of morality. There can therefore be a form of moral education provided by figures who are not exemplary.

What gives series their strength and makes them innovative is the way they are integrated into daily life, as well as our ordinary and repeated contact with characters to whom we become close – not on the classical model of recognition and identification, but rather that of contact and affection.[3] It is series' ability to educate us and make us grow through attachment to characters over the long course of their lives and to groups whose interactions include and animate us. The characters in TV series constitute series' primary "ontological" contribution and create viewers' attachment to these works. They are particular entities in whom the narrative, the actor, and our own lives intersect. They are the basis for the conversation that the viewer constantly engages in with his or her own moral conceptions while watching.

Television series teach us about paying attention to forms of life: much like parents, they initiate us into families and societies, into what Wittgenstein defines as *Lebensformen*, vital forms or configurations of human co-existence whose texture is made up of the practices and actions that produce or modify them. They are also ideal sites for perceiving ways of being: of people, relationships, and family resemblances. It is in a character's use of language (their choice of words, their style of conversation) that their moral vision is publicly shown or intimately developed. Television series thus pursue the quest for the ordinary and the "pedagogical" task defined by Cavell and undertaken by popular cinema: that of providing a subjective education through the sharing of experience and expression.

For Cavell, the importance of cinema is defined by its place in our ordinary form of life (and for me, the emergence of importance is part and parcel of moral perception, and means that reception is much more than passive reception, but rather a form of sensitivity, of mobilization and improvisation). Two facts

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2 See Laugier, *Ethique, Littérature, Vie Humaine.*
3 Laugier, *Nos Vies en Séries.*

interested Cavell in considering the value of popular cinema: first, the indisputable fact, which sets movies apart from other contemporary art forms, that cinema has had and continues to have importance for a very large, socially, and culturally heterogeneous audience. But this is even more true of TV series. The second is the ability of each viewer to make his or her own choices and to be educated, to "perfect" him- or herself in the multifaceted jungle of popular culture.[4] By seeing films not as works of art (although they undeniably are) but rather as shared and transformative experiences, whose important moments become moments of our own life, we can highlight the intrinsic value of TV series as constitutive of ordinary experience today. Of course, this requires forms of self-confidence on the part of the viewer, validation of one's own competence and capacity for reception.

For Cavell, "to take an interest in an object is to take an interest in one's experience of the object."[5] To assert the importance – aesthetic, political, or moral – of a television production is to describe one's own experience and the experience of others as much as possible. Such a conception of criticism is intimately linked to a conception of and even a loyalty to the philosophy of ordinary language. The idea that drives my work, as well as Martin Shuster's in his very important book *New Television*,[6] and which Cavell pursued throughout his career, is that there is a parallel between ordinary language (sensitivity to what we should say when) and aesthetic judgment (the discourse of criticism as determining importance).

This form of criticism – this ordinary criticism – requires taking seriously the moral intentions of the producers and screenwriters of television series and movies, and the constraints thus imposed on these forms of fiction, again in the tradition of Cavell's reading: breaking with a critical tradition that saw the intelligence of a film as a by-product of critical reading, Cavell emphasized that "What we are to see is the intelligence that a film has already brought to bear in its making":[7] the fact that the material itself educates the viewer, as well as the critic, and that its relevance is not dependent on a critical eye. We thus shift the question of morality toward that of the interpretation of public choices and the development of a common sensibility, simultaneously assumed and educated/transformed by the media. This implies care for the public in all senses of the phrase, or the public of care as constituted by this symbolic expression and the education provided by this expression. Of course, there can be good or bad education, but an education that takes seriously the viewer's moral capacity is indeed of the order of care.

Nowhere is the care elicited by series more evident than in the attachments we form to their characters. TV's fictional characters are so deeply rooted, so morally directed and clear in their moral expressions, without being archetypal, that they can be "let loose" and opened up to the imagination and use of everyone, "entrusted" to us – as if it were up to each of us to take care of them. Hence the importance, which I discuss here, of the conclusion of series, which must teach the viewer to do without them and thus confide something to the viewer, a secret that is the series itself. The way in which certain series take care of the viewer, including in how they end, is one of the strongest elements of the genre's originality: the metaphysical ending of *Six Feet Under*, which, after recounting one death per episode, presents the death of each of the characters in order to reconcile us with separation from them (and our own finitude); the end of *Lost*, which concludes by teaching the spectator and the characters to leave the island forever while preserving the experience; the last episodes of *Mad Men*, which gradually detach us from Don Draper by showing how everyone else learns to live without him. Or we may think of the conclusion of *Buffy*, whose heroine herself decides to end the structural prophecy of the series ("in every generation there is a killer.") by sharing her power with all girls; or the end of *The Americans*, where the children of Elizabeth and Philip teach us to "let go," to take leave of the series and its characters.

It is a question, in the tradition of Dewey, of public – because democratic – forms of cultural production. Dewey defined the public on the basis of an encounter with a problematic situation, in which people experience a specific difficulty that they initially perceive as arising from private life and for which they

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4 Cavell, *The World Viewed*; Cavell, *Cities of Words*.

5 Cavell, *Pursuits of Happiness*, 7.

6 Shuster, *New Television*.

7 Cavell, *Pursuits of Happiness*, 10.

must find public expression and legitimacy. Understood in light of this theory of the public, television inherits the task that Cavell saw as belonging to popular cinema: the moral education and constitution of a public. Public and popular forms of cultural production are democratic in the sense that, today, as demonstrated by the proliferation of blogs, amateur criticism, or even just any conversation about a popular series, they ascribe to each individual the capacity to trust his or her own judgment. The place that series and their worlds have come to occupy in viewers' lives demonstrate series' relationship to individual experience and the fact that they pursue the pedagogical task undertaken by popular cinema – that of an inseparably subjective and public education. This intertwining of the private and the public is also an intertwining of modes of constitution of the public, and is equally expressed in new modes of subjectivation by the public.

2 Popular culture and democracy

What is meant by popular culture today is no longer exactly popular in the social or political sense in which certain arts – for example, songs or folklore – once were, even if popular culture draws on the resources of these arts. When it comes to defining our shared, accessible heritage, we must think instead of the material of ordinary conversation. At one time, this might have been a recent film or a controversial book. Today, it is just as often a television series. Popular culture turns out to be a site for "the education of grownups," a form of education and cultivation of the self, or more precisely, of subjective *perfectionism*, a subjectivation that takes place through sharing and commenting on public and ordinary material that is integrated into ordinary life. It is in this sense that "we are all self-made men" and that cinema, for Warshow and Cavell, is at the heart of "popular culture" and the stakes of its criticism.

> Such a criticism finds its best opportunity in the movies, which are the most highly developed and most engrossing of the popular arts, and which seem to have an almost unlimited power to absorb and transform the discordant elements of our fragmented culture.[8]

And it is for this reason that we must take Cavell seriously when, in *Pursuits of Happiness*, he associates the argument of *It Happened One Night* by F. Capra, (1934) with that of *The Critique of Pure Reason*. Obviously there is something shocking in this, and this very scandal is what interests Cavell. It is not the association of cinema and philosophy that is scandalous (for it has become all too common), but rather making them equal in terms of their competence and capacity to educate and shape. Cinema is not (or for Cavell, not foremost) a matter of art: it has to do rather with shared experience. In this respect, cinema heralds the reign of television series. Cavell does not speak of seeing a film but of "moviegoing." It is less a matter of aesthetics than of *practice*, a practice that connects and reconciles public and private, subjective expectation and sharing in something common. For him, cinema is important because of its place in our lives and its exploration of genres, and because of its capacity to absorb and produce fragments of our experience – an essential aspect of popular culture, and which ordinary criticism must account for. TV shows as part of our ordinary forms of life have just this kind of importance.

The shift in interest to "ordinary" objects such as movies and TV shows leads to a transformation in aesthetics, and in ethics, through the formation provided by TV. This allows a new beginning for democratic thought and its perfectionist foundation, one based on Emersonian self-reliance and a Deweyan conception of the public. Understanding culture as given allows a redefinition of popular culture: not as pure entertainment devoid of value but as a work of moral education. Popular culture (TV shows, music, Internet videos) now plays a crucial role in re-formulating ethics and in the political and social constitution of democracy. In *The World Viewed*, Cavell 1971 took the "popular" nature of cinema as his starting point, connecting it to a certain relationship to ordinary life: a kind of intimacy with the ordinary; the integration of film into the viewer's ordinary life; its imbrication in everyday life and in constituting the viewer's experience.

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8 Warshow, *The Immediate Experience*, xxxviii.

Television shows belong, at once and inseparably, to private life and to the public domain: they are an interface and a site of education. Their morality comes from the fact that they are polyphonic. They contain a plurality of singular expressions, stage arguments and debates, and are permeated by a moral atmosphere. Sabine Chalvon-Demersay has analyzed the type of education provided by the very form in which television series are presented, and the turn that took place with series produced beginning in the 1990s (*ER*, *Friends*, *The West Wing*): the integration of characters into spectators' ordinary and familiar lives; viewers' initiation into new forms of life and new, initially opaque vocabularies that are not made explicit, without any heavy-handed guidance or explanation, as there had been in earlier productions.[9] The material and aesthetics of television series allows for contextualization, historicity (regularity, duration), familiarization, and education of perception (attention to the expressions and gestures of characters the viewer learns to know, attachment to recurring figures integrated into everyday life, the presence of faces and words on the "small screen"). This answers the question concerning the moral function of "public" works and the form of education they generate in the public *and* the private they create. For television series re-articulate the private and public differently than the darkened theatre does: they create their audience by slipping into private life. This intertwining of the private and the public is also an intertwining of modes of constituting a public: the address to the public/audience becomes the constitution of a public discourse and its norms. Morality is constituted by the claims of individuals, and by the recognition of others' claims; the recognition of a plurality of moral positions and voices within the same small world.

One of the innovations of the new series of the turn of the twenty-first century is the way they confront viewers with a work environment, a mysterious vocabulary, and a world whose elements cannot be immediately understood, so that the viewer is obliged to pay attention, to gain familiarity, and little by little, through this attention, to become educated – just like the child Wittgenstein describes at the beginning of the *Philosophical Investigations* who gradually becomes integrated into the form a life. The viewer is educated and cared for, as well as *cared about* in his or her moral capacity. Moral competence is not a matter of reasoning alone: it involves learning adequate expressions and educating one's sensibility – as, for example, a reader's sensibility is educated by an author, who makes certain situations and characters perceptible by placing (or depicting) them in the appropriate, fitting context. This is why the model of *perception*, based on the idea of description or vision, no longer suffices for explaining moral vision, which consists in seeing not objects or situations but rather the possibilities and meanings that emerge from them; in anticipating and improvising at every moment of perception.

3 Security series as popular genre

In France, the UK, Germany, the US, and Israel, a growing number of films and television series are set "behind the scenes" of democratic regimes faced with terrorist threats (in addition to *Homeland* and *The Bureau*, which I will discuss in detail here, we may cite *Hatufim*, *The Looming Tower*, *Fauda*, *False Flag*, *Kalifat*, and others). These works reveal a moral state of the world. They may be analyzed as "mirrors" of society, or as ideological tools. But they can also be understood as new resources for the education, creativity, and perfectibility of their audiences; as the emergence of a form of "soft power" that can serve as a resource for public policies and democratic conversation.

Because of their format (weekly/seasonal regularity, home viewing) and the participatory qualities of the Internet (tweeting, sharing, liking, chat forums), series allow for a new form of education by expressing complex issues through narrative and characters. However, their aesthetic potential for making ethical issues visible and their capacity to enable a democratic empowerment of viewers has not yet been analyzed, nor has their power for confronting cultural and social upheavals, and for developing a collective inquiry into democratic values and human security. By elucidating how these series are conceived by their creators

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9 Chalvon-Demersay, "La Confusion des Conditions," 235–83.

and audiences, we can understand if and how they might play a crucial role in building the awareness necessary for the safety of individuals and societies, and in creating shared and shareable values.

The wave of attacks that began in January 2015, and the more recent attacks of 2020, have reminded Europe and the world of the permanence of the terrorist threat. The entertainment industry has acknowledged this state of affairs as mainstream movies and television series represent and express the threats and risks that make up the current security context. Movies and series sometimes even anticipate threats, as *Homeland* (Showtime, 2011-) did, when, in its fifth season, written in 2014, it portrayed European jihadist terrorist cells. When the show was broadcast, the day after the November 2015 attacks in Paris, the creators changed the dialogue to include the attacks that had just struck the French capital. Thanks to their wide reach, such fictions provide strong common cultural references, which populate ordinary conversations and political debates. Moreover, their influence is not limited to only one country or area: current revolutions in the modes of production, distribution, and consumption of these fictions encourage circulation between cultural zones. Thus, even if US productions are dominant, the French series *Le Bureau des Légendes* (Canal+, 2015–2020) is shown internationally, and several British (*The State*, *Spooks*), German (*Berlin Station, Deutschland 1983*), and Israeli series (*Hatufim, Fauda, Our Boys*) are distributed globally. The porousness of the boundaries between the "factual" and the "fictional" facilitates the integration of these fictions into understandings of the world, systems of knowledge, and ways of envisioning a shared future. TV series shape common understandings of the controversial topic of security.

The importance that intangible components of power – so-called "soft power" – have taken on over the past thirty years constitutes an obvious transformation in forms of war. Information warfare, influence, manipulation, and counter-propaganda are at the heart of strategies to counter, for example, propaganda from the Islamic State. Though forms of soft power may seek to use fictional representations of terrorism to attempt to influence the enemy's decision-making processes or as forms of internal propaganda, movies and TV series can play a subtler, significant, and so far under-studied role in shaping scholarly analysis, education, and collective understandings of terrorist violence.

Thus far, these cultural objects have been considered in two main fashions: they have been either simply ignored as negligible and as mere entertainment, or analyzed through the lens of propaganda, influence, and manipulation. What has been missing until now is a more nuanced and exhaustive account of their impact on both the public and on defense actors, and of the consequences and risks of this impact. Filling in this gap means taking into account and demonstrating their degree of reflexivity, and their integration of the audience's moral capabilities.

My aim is to shift philosophical, political, and moral perspectives on the productions of "popular culture" by showing how popular culture operates when it comes to the topics of security and terrorism. In my perspective, popular culture is neither a primal stage nor an "inferior" or alienating version of culture: it creates shared and shareable values through the circulation and discussion of material that is available to all, and as such it is a major factor in the creation and nurturing of new democratic spaces. In the United States and France, the relationships between the entertainment industries and institutions of national security are being reshaped in new ways that attest to the importance cinematographic productions have taken on within state institutions.

Popular fiction is taken seriously by national security institutions: a few days after the September 11 attacks, the CIA initiated a series of meetings with film and TV creators (directors, screenwriters, producers) to help the agency imagine future attack scenarios and anticipate threats. Security institutions (defense, intelligence) are opening up to the entertainment industry in Europe. In 2016, the French minister of defense Le Drian announced the launch of a "Mission Cinéma" to encourage fiction creators to focus on subjects connected to the defense world. These developments have sparked fears that such works will be used as propaganda. They have also demonstrated that the scientific and political stakes of such initiatives have not yet been addressed, either in public debate or in scholarly research. In the United States, the partnership is well established. In 1948 the Pentagon created a liaison office with Hollywood – a move the CIA imitated in 1996, not without controversy, in order to increase the realism of film and TV productions as well as to improve the agency's public image and attract new recruits (a good example of the results of this liaison is the character Sydney Bristow, the hero of the show *Alias*, played by Jennifer Garner).

The movie *Zero Dark Thirty* (Kathryn Bigelow, 2012), which depicts the CIA's hunt for and eventual elimination of Osama Bin Laden on May 1, 2011, sparked debate over so-called "enhanced interrogation techniques." More than a hundred emails were declassified in 2014 as the result of a Freedom of Information Act request, revealing the closeness between the film's crew and the CIA. This was particularly problematic because the film has been read as defending the effectiveness of torture. Such cooperation inevitably raises political, ethical, and aesthetic questions. On the other hand, the Israeli show *Fauda*, which depicts the two-sided story of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through the work of an undercover Israeli unit operating inside Palestinian territories, was (at least at first) appreciated both by Israeli and Palestinian audiences, opening a previously unimaginable space for shared understanding and pluralism in a violent context. However, it quickly became apparent that the show is quite biased.

Security series open viewers to sympathy/empathy with characters at first seen as "enemies," and to difficult, no-win moral choices and situations. In representing terrorism and counter-terrorism in action, these fictions give audiences a specific experience of the contemporary security world. They can be seen as attempts at collective reflection, as a democratic inquiry (in Dewey's sense) into an increasingly complex reality. They give unprecedented visibility to a dimension of democratic life usually hidden from the public: secrecy, espionage, the "reason of State" in action.

4 The endings of two classic security shows

It has always been difficult for fans of a series to say goodbye, and for some, the recent end of two major shows has been one more disaster on top of the catastrophe of the pandemic. *The Bureau* is probably not in its final season, but we have reached the end of the series as we know and loved it, under the leadership of Eric Rochant, with his ever-endearing characters. *Homeland* (Showtime, 2011–2020) ended quietly after 8 seasons; in contrast, *The Bureau*, initially overlooked because of its arid and overly pedagogical style, is now lauded by critics and fans. However, the latter were not at all pleased with the last two episodes of season 5, which Rochant entrusted to director Jacques Audiard, and they have expressed their indignation on social media.

This is reminiscent of the final season of *Game of Thrones*, which also sparked irritated commentary from fans; a sign not only of separation anxiety but also of viewers' attachment to the show, their appropriation of the characters and their trajectories – characters who were so much a part of fans' lives that they felt like they knew them better than the creators who constructed this attachment in the first place. In this respect, the criticism that marked the series' final season and the many alternative endings fans proposed for it were the ultimate sign of the show's success. Similarly, the outcry from fans of *The Bureau*, who cannot bear the break in style between the bulk of the series and its latest episodes, or who lament the fact that various characters have been abandoned mid-course (what will become of Pacemaker?!) indicates the intensity of their relationship to the series and its heroes, constructed over the years, and to the very aesthetic of the show. This tendency of the audience to appropriate characters, to find it difficult to let go of them, to not know what will happen to them, is proof – if any were needed – of the extent to which TV series are part of our lives, especially when we have seen characters evolve and change, including physically, over the years.[10]

Homeland belongs to a new Hollywood tradition in which a series can have a strong and beautiful ending, even after a slight drop in quality (the same can be said of *The Americans* and *The Affair*). Created by Alex Gansa and Howard Gordon, *Homeland* received a great deal of criticism after an aesthetically, morally, and politically innovative first season, which brought together a high-level American soldier, Nicholas Brody, a Marine Corps sergeant and prisoner of war who converted to terrorism during his captivity, was "released" by an Islamist leader, and welcomed home as a hero, and the CIA agent Carrie

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10 This is the argument of Laugier, *Nos Vies en Séries*.

Mathison, who is suspicious of him and decides to surveille him around the clock at home. *Homeland* was abandoned by a large part of its audience after its second season, when the plot between Carrie and Brody stalled out; this is unfortunate, because the series became fascinating once again beginning in the fifth season, which closely tracked the security issues of the moment. The first shot of the show's final episode – entitled "Prisoners of War," a translation of the title of the Israeli series *Hatufim* that inspired the show – is of Brody, thus closing the circle.

Homeland and *The Bureau* are paradigmatic examples of the "security series" genre, which was born in 2001: the 9/11 attacks on New York and Washington happened to coincide with the release of the major series *24*, which had been shot and scheduled well before. By presenting the constitutive stakes of a permanent state of insecurity, characterized by multiform threats and deterritorialized enemies, security series are not only sites onto which this new state of insecurity is projected but are fully constitutive of it. In this way, security series directly raise the question of the relationship between reality and fiction. Even when they are fictional and dramatized, reality sometimes catches up with them. In the case of *Homeland* and *The Bureau*, it is not the "real" that influences fiction, but rather "reality" and "fiction" co-determine one another. Thus, it is necessary to take into account and demonstrate their degree of *reflexivity*, while at the same time reconsidering the question of "realism" – understood not as a resemblance to reality, but rather in terms of impact and action on "the real."

This unprecedented relationship between reality and fiction results, in part, from a revolution in how these series are made: connections between television professionals and security actors in the United States, the United Kingdom, and France (the Pentagon, the CIA, MI-6, DGSE) have proliferated. The question is not how these series echo a certain political climate, but rather, conversely, what the impact of these series may be on democratic regimes, understood as spaces of deliberation and contestation, spaces where conflict is framed. TV series provide strong common cultural referents, which populate both ordinary conversations and political debates. The revolution in narrative practices in the twenty-first century, which has gone along with true inventiveness on the part of series creators, has led to a change in the moral ambition of series. This has also allowed production to expand beyond the US classics. Here, we may note, in addition to Israeli series, which can be said to have created the subject, the quality and originality of European political series (the Danish *Borgen*, DR1, 2010–2013; the French *Baron noir*, *No Mans's Land* (Arte, 2020-); the Spanish *La Casa de Papel*, Netflix 2018-; the Norwegian *Occupied*, TV2, 2015–2019; and the Swedish *Kalifat*, Netflix, 2020). It seems that the security series genre – and political series more broadly – represents an opportunity to challenge American dominance in television by multiplying political points of view and demanding more of the viewer. From the outset, it was the ambition of *The Bureau* to do better, and be truer, than *Homeland*.

5 Realism and trust

By immersing us in very specific worlds, security series modify the viewer's *experience*: their virtual topography influences the viewer's opinion or judgment of the situations they present. Other factors are also at play here: the actors' acting, the viewer's attachment to characters, and frequent contact with them over the long duration of the series, the polyphony that makes it possible to hear diverging points of view and to become interested in a character initially perceived as an "enemy" or as inscrutable. A logic of empowerment is at work here, allowing the viewer to perfect him- or herself within a context with which few are familiar, and to gain a better understanding of political situations. If we miss *Homeland* or *The Bureau* when they are gone, it is as "matrices of intelligibility" that allow their viewers to understand the world around them, as well as to demonstrate their own creativity (by creating pastiches, writing summaries of imaginary episodes, reinventing characters' trajectories, etc.). This ambition of security series has paralleled the practical ethical reflection that all series have developed – an "ordinary" ethics, anchored in attention to the particularities of situations and human personalities, which we find at work in *24*, *Homeland*, *Fauda, The Bureau*, and especially in *The Looming Tower* (Amazon, 2017), which presents the

conflicts and human errors that handicapped the FBI and CIA in the years leading up to September 11. These are traits shared by many important series, but security series make them into elements of political analysis.

The major series-producing countries – the US, the UK, Israel, Denmark, Germany, and France – today face, in different ways, a weakening of democracy and national unity as a result of various risks (terrorist violence, aging populations, increasing inequality, environmental crises, and now the pandemic), which makes developing new tools both for protecting populations and for providing democratic education necessary and urgent. TV series have thus become sites of collective moral education, and have emerged as political resources at a time when democracies are under threat. However, since they are still seen as "popular" media and mere entertainment, their potential to play this role has not been fully considered.

With the end of *24*, and now, of *Homeland*, we find ourselves lacking globally shared cultural material that can transmit transatlantic and transgenerational values. In Europe and Israel, the security genre – now led by *The Bureau* – is flourishing, but for the moment, the US has no homegrown successor to *Homeland*.

6 The enemy within: From *24* to *Homeland*

24 was launched the day after September 11; *Homeland* began ten years later, in 2011, after the death of Bin Laden and at the moment when *24* had temporarily ended. *Homeland* took on part of *24*'s team, as well as its mission, and September 11 is omnipresent within it, as its famous opening credits show. It must be said that things have changed since *24*'s melancholic ending, and that security series have become dominant as a genre that goes beyond suspense and characters' personal plot twists to express a veritable vision of national security, and, more broadly, of human security – a shared goal of democracies. *Homeland*, like *The Bureau*, is a realist production that, by way of the Israeli series that inspired it, takes part in the globalization of the security genre.

Homeland belongs to a category of works addressed to a mainstream audience that represent and express the multiform risks that make up the current security environment and that seek to describe and anticipate these threats. Whereas *24*, its predecessor in many ways, sought above all to conjure the terrorist threat in the wake of September 11, *Homeland,* while remaining a work of fiction that does not hesitate to veer into the rocambolesque, is more concerned with adhering as close to the real as possible, and thereby informing, educating, and preventing; its showrunners work in cooperation with intelligence experts. Its originality lies in its redefinition of the contemporary terrorist threat through the figure of the homegrown terrorist – a marginal subject in *24*.

It is fascinating to observe how *Homeland*, which depicts a (strong) female president – who was also written and planned well in advance – was able to operate a turnaround after Trump's election, taking the new stakes into account by transforming this character into a megalomaniac dictator who decides to silence the opposition and imprison the majority of independent officials in her administration. The most lucid and educational aspect of the new season concerns the fatal, targeted circulation of fake news (a fabricated image supposedly revealing the FBI's responsibility for the death of a child) at a moment of crisis. The expression "fake news" has become a hallmark of Trump's communication, but *Homeland* demonstrates the relevance of "fake news" to forms of manipulation that involve casting suspicion on certain communities or governments, and thereby destroying national solidarity. The true enemies from within are the divisions and tensions that are heightened by fake news and weaken the social fabric.

Thus, *Homeland* has emerged as a concentrate of the security genre, a fusion of *24* and the Israeli series that inspired it. It has always been excessively dramatic, in particular in terms of Carrie's personal adventures, but it has also been remarkably well suited to the political moment: season 7 depicts fake news in the service of fascism; season 8 has an incompetent president more concerned with his image than with catastrophe. These series are written in the face of threats; no longer "merely" the threat of terrorism, but also that of self-destruction by dangerous leaders. Henceforth, the enemy is no longer a particular person or group, but the inability of rulers to respond to threats, to the chaos – to use the title of another major series in the security genre, *Fauda* ("chaos" in Hebrew) – created by lies, war, disorganization, and

mutual trust. This makes *Homeland* and other series in the genre particularly appropriate to the moment of the Covid-19 pandemic. Thus, it is somehow fitting that *Homeland* ended in the midst of another major crisis and in the face of a new enemy. In the United States, the figure of 3,000 dead from Covid-19 in New York – exceeding the death toll from the September 11 attacks – marked a symbolic threshold and was announced in dramatic fashion. The various themes that run through and define the security genre have never been so strong and visible as they are now, when vulnerability has become universal and security is our shared responsibility.

The final episode of *Homeland* is entitled "Prisoners of War" – a translation of the name of the series that originally inspired it – and it opens with a shot of Brody, at a moment when Carrie appears to be about to betray her country. We don't know what the future of the security genre will bring, but *Homeland* changed how the fight against terrorism is seen: from the overactive, patriotic, and sometimes Manichean vision of *24*, the genre moved toward ambivalence, by means of its unstable heroine (Carrie's bipolar disorder represents the impossibility of global equilibrium) and a complex view of geopolitics, of violence in the Middle East, and of the role American politicians play in it.

Homeland, like *24*, proclaims itself fiction, and uses the audience's attachment to fictional characters to implicate us in political matters. But its role goes beyond creating a fictional universe that corresponds to global threats, beyond the topic of terrorism. The series has endeavored not only to make the terrorist threat known and to remind us that the worst is always to come (a theme already taken up by *24*), but also to make us attentive to the invisible threat, rather than to highly visible signals, to teach us the always-alert gaze: the image of Carrie, in front of her surveillance screen, hypnotized by Brody's private life in the first episodes, is probably the most marking and disturbing image of the entire series, because it transforms the viewer, turning us all into spies, responsible for surveillance.

Homeland set for itself the task of making the American public see and understand the causes – and not merely the consequences – of terror, including its own terror; of demonstrating the US's role in and responsibility for attacks on its own soil; of showing the dangers that heightened surveillance poses to democratic life and to the ideals of the nation; and of displaying the internal dangers posed by an incapable and ideologized government. Thus, fiction plays a crucial role in constituting post-attack culture, and now, in constituting crisis culture. It is interesting to see how the series has affected political reality, giving the public a way to interpret events that occur after it. If *24* was a response to terror, *Homeland* redefines the nation (whence its title, which has taken on increasing significance), by showing the causes of it. It expresses the end of innocence and sounds the alarm against an erroneous – even egotistic – feeling of safety within democracies on the precipice of disaster.

Homeland was the first indication that these series could begin to not only represent but analyze foreign conflicts – and the role of the US in them – in a new way. During its eight seasons, *Homeland* confronted its audience with a complex vision of global conflicts, a view of violence in the Middle East as well as the American political violence that influenced and encouraged it. Over these eight seasons, Carrie Mathison led a tumultuous professional life, changed posts and continents approximately every season, had a child, and was involved in several significant relationships after Brody. But the relationship that defines *Homeland* is the one between Carrie (Claire Danes) and Saul Berenson (Mandy Patinkin), who has gone from being head of the Middle Eastern division of the CIA to the interim director to the president's national security advisor, and has always been Carrie's strongest ally. It would be simplistic (and sexist) to say that Saul is Carrie's mentor, for she constantly pushes him in new and impossible directions, and theirs is truly a relationship of mutual education. This unstable balance, in which Carrie constantly goes too far (including for her own mental health, which thus plays a crucial role in the dynamic of the series), and in which Saul supports and encourages her nevertheless, is constitutive of the series and its moral tonality.

Carrie and Saul often try to solve the same security problem from different angles, and their partnership became – and remained until the end – the true aesthetic and political framework of the series, through to their final, radical moral disagreement: can one sacrifice someone to save the world? This question – the response to which is clear for both *24* and for utilitarian moral philosophy – is finally itself questioned in the final episodes of the final season, in which Saul teaches one last lesson to Carrie, and to the audience: no, there is never any reason to decide to sacrifice someone, and especially not if that person has your trust, is a

friend, and has saved your life. And even if Carrie does not agree, the entirety of the series is devoted to the theme of such trust and the unbreakable bonds of friendship in a world of betrayals (Quinn, Max, and, ultimately, Yevgeny).

It is revealing, and quite magnificent, that the series ends with this partnership still in place, even if Carrie and Saul will undoubtedly never see one another again in person. Carrie is in Russia, sending information to Saul – just as his best Russian double agent, an official government translator, had done for decades, and using the same method (sending books with a note inserted; a representation of the cultural tradition to which these series refer). Although Carrie came close to assassinating Saul to get to this point, she continues her career, living on into a future that goes beyond the series, the last words of which are: "Stay Tuned."

Homeland takes on almost surreal relevance within our current climate by depicting a world confronting an international crisis. In this sense, it is a better illustration of our situation today than the many epidemic or contagion films that have been made. The creators of *Homeland* do not claim to end the wars in the Middle East, nor do they have the series end with the end of the world. To conclude the series, they based themselves on what was always the driver of this atypical series, the difficult relationship of absolute trust between Saul and Carrie. It is significant that the series ends with a sort of remarriage, in keeping with the Hollywood tradition of remarriage movies: a remarriage of friendship, a confirmation of Saul's and Carrie's alliance, which is still in place, even at a distance.

In the last episode, Carrie shows her Russian friend Yevgeny (played by Costa Ronin, straight out of *The Americans*) the video Saul has left in case he dies, in which he says, "In the end, who you trust in this life is all that matters." *Homeland* doesn't end with a field of ruins or an assassination, or with a departure into the setting sun, like *24*, but with what has always been the heart of the series: the trust between these two characters, a delicate feeling but one that turns out to be the only solid connection within the threats of the present. Ultimately, this trust extends to the viewer, whom the series has educated over all these years, and to whom the two main characters entrust the responsibility of continuing to reflect on the world; entrusting to him or her or a world much more dangerous, false, and vicious than the world of 2011, or 2001.

7 *The Bureau*

Trust is not the central element of *The Bureau*, whose hero spends his time betraying and deceiving others. The relationships between characters are not transparent, and it is the absence of transparence between various circuits that is constantly revealed in the series, especially in the fifth season. Some characters are aware that "Malotru" is not dead and that his mission continues; others suspect it; others are unaware and are very upset. As Raymond says to Marina, when she expresses surprise at not hearing from her former colleagues at the Bureau once she is transferred to a different department: "We're not family." And yet, viewers care about these characters as they would care about a family member; we care about Malotru, who disappears in flames in the last images of season 4, about the undercover agent "Pacemaker" in Russia – who bears a name borrowed from another agent – and, in season 5, which shows the danger each character, scattered across the world, is facing, we care about Marie-Jeanne, about Malotru who resurfaces, and about the bizarre new character Andrea/Mille Sabords, etc. But our intense care for the characters is not to be seen in the relations between them, even if it becomes evident in moments of danger.

Eric Rochant's series is exemplary of security series, and no doubt is the best show in the genre. It takes a relatively distant point of view from its subject matter and has a pedagogical and documentary aspect. The show, no more than *Homeland*, is not a "mirror of society," nor an ideological base for it, but rather a concrete and realist tool of democratic action, by virtue of its educational value and the political and moral training it provides its audience, a task that it too takes very seriously. From its first episode, the series has led the viewer step-by-step through the (fictional) operations of the DGSE, and has clearly and expertly presented the dimensions of major geopolitical crises in the Middle East. The stakes of the war in Syria and of the radicalized young people who go there (also the subject of two other excellent series, *The State* and

Kalifat) are carefully laid out, but never in a way that feels heavy-handed, because everything is communicated through dialogue and situations. Seasons 4 and 5 add extra layers of complexity and anxiety by depicting cyberattacks and digital spying.

The show's aesthetic and pedagogical ambition is also to anchor political analysis in the human: it is a series about "human intelligence". "Human is best," Sylvain Ellenstein declares to his geek acolytes, and this is not a humanist declaration but a technical one: beyond the various forms of technology the show depicts, the best sources of information are the infiltrated agents, their contacts, and their ways of being and interactions. Thus, the latest seasons of *Homeland* and of *The Bureau* conclude with stories about double agents – an inexhaustible subject ever since Le Carré, but here updated for the Russia of today. This human material gives *The Bureau* its particular moral density, and the best vehicles for its ultimately arduous goals are its endearing characters: "Malotru," Marie-Jeanne, JJA, Marina, Raymond, as well as the apparently "secondary" characters to whom the viewer becomes attached over the course of the seasons. They make it possible for the show to express moral conflicts, which proliferate over the last two seasons. But they are also the electrifying vectors of the tension that fills the show, and the genre as a whole: the tension between personal feelings and professional obligations, between loyalty to the rules and loyalty to friends and family – in other words, between politics and care. These characters' humanity is signaled by the omnipresence of their sexuality in the last season, which points beyond the relative coolness of the narrative to their human vulnerability (see for example the analyst Jonas in the field in the Middle East and on the much more difficult battlefield of human seduction).

The Bureau, like its counter-model *Homeland*, describes the entanglement of abstract geopolitics and the bloody reality of sacrificed lives. The fifth season shows the harshness of the relations between agents (Sisteron betrays JJA and sets a trap for Marie-Jeanne when she applies to become head of intelligence) as well as the trust that is subtly established between two characters, Marina and Andrea, over the course of two conversations. It is no small paradox that this highly masculine series (with its male-dominated hierarchy and the impressive figures of Duflot, Malotru, and Sisteron) ends not only with the ascension of Marie-Jeanne, but also through her: it is she who proposes closing the Bureau when she is recruited to be head of intelligence at the DGSE; she is the one who brings the series to an end. This was an act the show's creator, Eric Rochant, did not feel carrying out – hence the change of director for the last two episodes. It is remarkable that the show that tried to be the most "objective" and anti-spectacular of the security genre expresses, in the structure of the writing of its final episode – that is, in its aesthetic – the deep suffering that comes from leaving these characters. Unless, perhaps, this is a difficulty particular to the genre, and one that ultimately sets it apart: the violent attachment it creates to characters whose own humanity is constantly under threat.

8 Conclusion

Popular fiction has particular powers in the analysis and perception of terrorist violence, in the transmission and sharing of meanings and values, and therefore of means of resistance. It is a matter of understanding how cultural objects that until recently were considered profoundly unimportant or pure entertainment can have such a considerable impact on both the public and actors in the political and defense worlds. One crucial concept that calls for further development in studying television series such as *Homeland* or *The Bureau* that deal with the conflict between ethics and politics is that of "point of view." Point of view literally, because the position and the technical settings of the camera, in combination with the editing, assign a point of experience to the viewer; figuratively, because this virtual topography influences the opinion or judgment he or she will have of the situation thus presented. Given the logic of empowerment at play in this genre, which allows the spectator to "profit" and to perfect him- or herself in a field not well known to many, it is no longer appropriate to speak of "reception" but rather of the usage of television series, with all that implies of agency and inventiveness in forms of attachment to a cultural object. Today, the best-loved products in the entertainment industry are "intelligibility matrices" that allow

their viewers to understand the world around them, but also to be creative (pastiches, synopsis of imaginary episodes, reinvention trajectories of characters, reviews, etc.). Much work still remains to be done around the concept of point of view in security series and the usages of popular TV series.

Like all series, but especially those in this corpus, the study of security series requires special resources in moral and ethical philosophy – no longer a "liberal" or normative ethics but an ethics anchored in values, vulnerability, and care.[11] Security series paradoxically allow the emergence of a heterodox ethics that constitutes a real alternative to the mainstream ethics of decisions and behaviors, which are far removed from everyday realities as from political realities. The alternative and context-based moral conceptions they present constitute the moral element of these public works, and define the form of education that they inspire in the public. The question of a morality expressed by contemporary media is therefore entangled in all dimensions of private and public life.

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11 See Blistène and Chopin, "Homeland."