Introduction

The overall ratings of traditional television networks[1] have been constantly dropping in recent years,[2] and so has the number of cable/satellite bundles subscriptions[3] as well as the amount of time spent watching linear TV among members of generations Y and Z.[4] Focusing solely on these statistics, one might assume that the widely circulated prophecies about the inevitable death of television are being fulfilled before the public's eyes (or, more appropriately, out of sight of the uninterested public). Stemming from such a perspective was the — popular to this day — presupposition "that 'new media' was arriving to kill off 'old media' such as television".[5] From this point of view more and more potential viewers seem to turn away from the old comforts of television, opting instead to spend time in front of other, competing, and apparently more attention-grabbing screens: laptops, tablets and smartphones. All of these devices allow their users to access audiovisual content without the limitations of a strict schedule, which for many years has been perceived as the crucial feature of television as a medium.

However, as Amanda Lotz rightly points out, while the nonlinear delivery of content and other technological affordances clearly challenge some of the established assumptions on the nature of television, they

> alone do not require the assessment of internet-distributed audiovisual messages as distinct from the medium of television. In many cases, these messages are still produced within industrial logics consistent with broadcast- and cable-distributed television. A "medium" derives not only from technological capabilities, but also from textual characteristics, industrial practices, audience behaviors, and cultural understanding. The matrix of these factors encourages the consider-

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[1] "Traditional", in the sense used here, refers to networks broadcast terrestrially or delivered via cable/satellite.

[2] R. Porter, "TV long view: Five years of network ratings declines in context", https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/live-feed/five-years-network-ratings-declines-explained-1241524 (accessed: 1.07.2020).

[3] D. Bloom, "Cord-cutting jumps 10 points in two years as most desired demos drop too", *Forbes*, https://www.forbes.com/sites/dbloom/2019/01/31/cord-cutting-study-pwc-nielsen-2019-pay-tv-statistics/#5b66378c2242 (accessed: 1.07.2020).

[4] C. Buckle, "The state of broadcast TV in 2019", https://blog.globalwebindex.com/chart-of-the-week/broadcast-tv-2019/ (accessed: 1.07.2020).

[5] A.D. Lotz, *Portals: A Treatise on Internet-Distributed Television*, Ann Arbor, MI 2017, https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/maize/mpub9699689/1:6/--portals-a-treatise-on-internet-distributed-television?rgn=div1;view=fulltext (accessed: 1.07.2020).

ation of many types of internet-distributed video to be understood as characteristic of "television".[6]

Lotz then goes on to propose that streaming platforms and other "portals" — which she defines as "the crucial intermediary services that collect, curate, and distribute television programming via internet distribution"[7] — should be seen as segments of "internet-distributed television" rather than wholly new media, distinct from and hostile toward its antiquated predecessor.

If one accepts Lotz's compelling argument, then the assessment of television's standing in the current media landscape must be significantly altered. From that perspective, TV continues to be a very potent medium at the turn of the 21st century's second decade. Television content plays a vital role not only in the entertainment milieu, but also in society as a whole. American scripted shows in particular have recently claimed an unprecedented cultural significance. They are also now more abundant than ever before, due to the so-called Peak TV trend, which — before the COVID-19 outbreak — had shown no signs of slowing down: in 2019, American networks and portals aired 532 scripted shows![8] The coronavirus pandemic will almost certainly affect this rapid expansion, but the fact that — at the moment of writing this article — numerous hit series have resumed production[9] is a testimony to the industry's resilience.

This issue of *Prace Kulturoznawcze* therefore aims to add relevant voices to the discussion of new developments in the field of television.[10] One of the eponymous "new frontiers" for TV is the afore-described internet delivery of content — and all of the six articles included in the issue deal, to a lesser or greater extent, with shows delivered through these new channels of distribution. The most prominent common thread for the texts included in this volume, however, are the new frontiers of representation. In the opening article, Michał Witek describes the "Yellow Peril" discourse as well as specific stereotypes about Asians and Asian Americans that pervaded television screens for many decades, and only recently have begun to be somewhat undermined. One of the apparent reasons for this shift is the streaming revolution, which has accelerated the medium's drive toward more niche- and minority-oriented programming and normalized representation of non-white Americans. These processes have also, according to Witek, affected the way broadcast networks operate, as demonstrated by the example of ABC's *Fresh off the Boat* (ABC, 2015–2020). Contrasted with an example of an earlier and cruder

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[6] Ibid.

[7] Ibid.

[8] J. Koblin, "It's not an illusion: Peak TV is showing no signs of slowing", *The New York Times* 9.01.2020, sec. *Business*, p. 4.

[9] T. Hersko, "What TV shows have resumed production?", *IndieWire*, https://www.indiewire.com/feature/television-shows-resumed-production-1234581186/ (accessed: 21.08.2020).

[10] The articles gathered in this issue were previously presented during a conference organized by the Institute of Cultural Studies at the University of Wroclaw.

sitcom featuring a predominantly-Asian cast (*All-American Girl*, 1994–1995), *Fresh off the Boat* serves as a proof that television's treatment of racial stereotypes may be quite nuanced. In Witek's opinion

> The characters in *Fresh Off the Boat* face the burden of representing Asian Americans by acknowledging the fact that stereotypes are a part of their reality and should be recognized, highlighted and deconstructed through irony. This process has great comedic potential, as it turns out greater than simple exploitation and perpetuation of stereotypes.[11]

The representation of racial minorities is also very much in the foreground of Antonio Gallardo Gracia's article, "*Dear White People Vol. 2*: Social networking as an enforcing tool for racial inequality". Gracia describes how the second season of Netflix's show (2017–2020) explores the issue of harmful use of social networking sites in present-day America. The analysis of *Dear White People*'s second season is performed within a frame of studies on Computer-Mediated Communication, and aims to anchor the show's narrative in contemporary, non-fictional social and political developments.

Politics and ideology are likewise central to Paweł Kaczmarski's article, entitled "On the back burner. Depictions of fascism in contemporary TV drama", which analyzes shows such as *The Man in the High Castle* (Amazon Prime, 2015–2019), *Peaky Blinders* (BBC, 2013–?) and *Pennyworth* (Epix, 2019–?), among others. Kaczmarski argues that the fictitious representations of Nazism and fascism in recent television can serve as an impulse for reflective exploration of contemporary mainstream politics, as these series remind the viewers "that in the modern world, fascism is never that far away, and the line separating mainstream politics from right-wing extremism is precarious at best".[12] What is more, according to Kaczmarski, this difficult feat is accomplished by the analyzed TV shows in large part because of the intrinsic attributes of television narratives — their sheer length, complexity and employment of environmental storytelling.

Alexandra Madarászová and Michaela Zemanová, in turn, explore how the concepts from the field of International Relations (IR) are reflected in television shows distributed globally by Netflix. In their article, Madarászová and Zemanová provide the readers with a highly readable primer on the most important IR theories and then go on to employ methods of visual qualitative analysis to examine shows such as *Traitors* (originally broadcast in the United Kingdom by Channel 4, 2019) *1983* (Netflix, 2018), *Nobel* (NRK, 2016), *Pine Gap* (ABC, 2018) and *Homeland* (Showtime, 2011–2020). The authors claim that from the perspective of IR, "most of the selected series are produced primarily with elements of

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[11] M. Witek, "The changing face of the 'Yellow Peril' — representations of Asians and Asian Americans in the context of the 'streaming revolution' in the United States", *Prace Kulturoznawcze* 24, 2020, no 4, p. 26.

[12] P. Kaczmarski, "On the back burner: Depictions of fascism in contemporary TV drama", *Prace Kulturoznawcze* 24, 2020, no 4, p. 45.

traditional theoretical approaches of international relations (especially realism), despite the fact that new approaches are beginning to appear in the series".[13]

Recent expansion of televisual frontiers has created a space for new definitions of authorship within the medium. The small screen has traditionally been described as "the writer's medium" or, on the verge of the post-network era, as "the producer's medium".[14] In the past two decades, however, the notion that the actual *auteur* of a series is its showrunner has gained more and more recognition among critics and researchers. In my article, I focus on one-sheet posters for television shows and miniseries run by David Simon, in order to ascertain if the publicity materials in question support the concept of "showrunner as an *auteur*".

In the concluding article, Joanna Szydełko describes "The quest for a successful book-to-series adaptation in the times of SVOD". Concentrating primarily on *The Handmaid's Tale* (Hulu, 2017–?) and *Alias Grace* (CBC, 2017) — both based on Margaret Atwood's books — Szydełko examines the criteria by which contemporary televisual book adaptations are being judged. The author also describes the opportunities and challenges for small-screen versions of successful books in the era of streaming services. According to Szydełko, "the ultimate need of SVOD creators is to convey their interpretation of a certain book in an entertaining way, but more importantly, they should respond to socio-cultural changes and shifts. By modifying a literary prototype, adapters bring a new analytical perspective to bear".[15]

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[13] A. Madarászová, M. Zemanová, "Reflection of international relations theories in selected TV series distributed by Netflix", *Prace Kulturoznawcze* 24, 2020, no 4, p. 72.

[14] See: H. Newcomb, R.S. Alley, *The Producer's Medium: Conversations with Creators of American TV*, New York 1983.

[15] J. Szydełko, "The quest for a successful book-to-series adaptation in the times of SVOD — on the examples of *The Handmaid's Tale* and *Alias Grace* by Margaret Atwood", *Prace Kulturoznawcze* 24, 2020, no 4, p. 94.

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