Aesthetics of the Narrative Climax in Contemporary TV Serials

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to identify precisely how certain cognitive-emotional processes drawn out over time, propitiated by certain properties of the work, configure the aesthetic experience of a climax. I have chosen as my object of study a case in which the temporal prolongation of the work is evident: serial narration for the screen. Therefore, this article will progress from the description of two case studies: firstly, Bron/Broen, Season 1 (Hans Rosenfeldt, 2011-present), to focus on the climax of a whole season; and secondly, The Americans, Season 6 (Joe Weisberg, 2013-2018), where I will examine a phenomenon of greater temporal scope and explore the final climax of a whole serial. The main conclusion is that the climax in a series is the culmination of the artistically crafted convergence of prolonged temporal processes, which is key to the aesthetic experience and appreciation of the work. The first active ingredient of that convergence has been identified here as the set of strategies of temporal prolongation related to the main suspenseful events and plotlines, the second active ingredient is the set of prolonged temporal processes of character development, the third and final ingredient is the multiplot structure, which contributes both to the prolongation of the suspense and to enhancing the complexity of the characters. This convergence is an event in the spectator’s mind that is marked by emotional and cognitive intensity, to the extent that it can increase the degree of narrative absorption previously achieved. All this suggests that the aesthetic experience of the climax plays an important role in the aesthetic experience of the series as a whole, as the elements introduced in the climax, and their appreciation, may prove key to the viewer’s overall appreciation of the work.

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