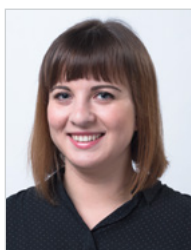


# Historical and conceptual review of authorship and its implications for television media: the concept of author in American contemporary fiction TV-series<sup>1 2</sup>

*Revisión histórica y conceptual de la autoría y sus implicaciones en el medio televisivo: el concepto de autor en las series de televisión contemporáneas estadounidenses*



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#### Abstract:

This paper aims to conduct a historical and conceptual review of authorship in television production, taking auteur theory applied to the television media as a reference. For this purpose, the qualitative methodology has been used to carry out a bibliographic and documentary analysis of the author concept in the film and television industry. Despite the collaborative nature of television production, the results obtained suggest the importance of the TV series executive producer's individual authorship during this process, who is also known as the “*showrunner*”. They are ultimately responsible for the project's production, applying a creative and personal style to their entire work. The authorship, influenced by the television channel and the audience, promotes the consideration of fiction TV series as a quality cultural product, which affects its promotional strategies.

#### Keywords:

Authorship; showrunner; TV series; auteur theory; collaborative process.

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#### Resumen:

*El presente artículo tiene como objetivo realizar una revisión histórica y conceptual de la autoría en la producción televisiva, tomando como referente la Politique des Auteurs francesa aplicada a la televisión estadounidense. Con dicha finalidad, desde una metodología cualitativa, se lleva a cabo un análisis bibliográfico y documental del concepto de autor en la industria del cine y la televisión. Pese al carácter colaborativo del proceso de producción televisiva, los resultados revelan la significación en éste de una autoría individual: el productor ejecutivo de series de ficción televisiva, conocido con el término de ‘showrunner’. Estamos ante el máximo responsable de la producción del proyecto, que aplica un estilo creativo personal en el conjunto de su obra audiovisual. Dicha autoría, influenciada por la cadena de televisión y los espectadores, promueve la consideración de las series de ficción como un producto cultural de calidad e influye en las estrategias de promoción del mismo.*

#### Palabras clave:

*Authorship; showrunner; TV series; auteur theory; collaborative process.*

## 1. Introduction

The attribution of authorship over a creative project represents a complex undertaking, promoting critics and scholars from different disciplines –literature, cinema, and television– to show an interest in this issue. In this sense, many academic researchers have reviewed contributions regarding the concept of author in cinema and literature, whose findings will provide the basis for studying it in the television media (Mittell, 2015).

The *Politique des Auteurs* has undergone several alterations, criticism, and changes from its outset. On the whole, it consists in sustaining the director's position as the film author, and his activity as a form of creative self-expression.

They leave a reiterative hallmark on their entire audiovisual work (Cuevas, 1994; Sanderson, 2005; Pellejero, 2012; Chaudhuri, 2013; Galindo-Pérez, 2015).

In the contemporary era, it is essential to touch upon this paradigm in the television industry, highlighting the increase and popularity of TV series production, which has focused critics and journalists' attention on this media (Schatz, 2014; Perren and Schatz, 2015).

Therefore, several studies allocate television authorship to the executive-creative producer and assess the consideration of the *showrunner as auteur* (Newman and Levine, 2012; Blakey, 2017). With this in mind, Kompare (2011: 99-101) identifies three related notions: television production is understood as a collaborative process, television authorship constitutes a brand that allows television channels to compete within the global market thanks to their signature TV series, and this phenomenon contributes to the formation of so-called 'cult' audiences, as well as an increased interest in the media field.

To understand the notion of the author in television media, we should consider his/her activity in an economic and culturally specific context (Mittell, 2015; Blakey, 2017), noting the complex communication system that the collaborative production process involves. It makes it difficult to discern who the audiovisual author is (Cantor, 1988; Thompson and Burns, 1990; Kubey, 2009; Mann, 2009). Despite this, Hills (2013: 201) proclaims that 'far from receding as a topic of academic and audience interest, authorship has become an increasingly important factor for the TV industry, with a US-style "showrunner" model being adopted.'

We can emphasize prior research, such as Newcomb and Alley's book (1983) –*The Producer's Medium*– which already assigned the creative control of television to the executive producer. They asserted that this audiovisual profile has a personal vision and a skill set for guiding the different professionals' ideas, which are crucial to the project's result. Moreover, in the twenty-first century the cited notions are stressed due to the popularity acquired by the showrunner, who, according to Newman and Levine (2012: 38), 'is potentially an auteur, an artist of unique vision whose experiences and personality are expressed through storytelling craft, and whose presence in cultural discourses functions to produce authority for the forms with which he is identified.'

## 2. Objectives and Methodology

The main objective of this paper is to analyze and offer a historical and documental review of the authorship in American television media, through the application of the ideas stemming from the *Politique des Auteur*. With this goal in mind, we have utilized a qualitative methodology to examine a specialized bibliography on both contexts: from papers published in the French film magazine *Cahiers du Cinéma* to texts that assess the attribution of television authorship to the showrunner in the contemporary era.

Therefore, this article has been divided into three parts in order to develop the proposed research. Firstly, as a basic premise, we should emphasize that audiovisual production is a collaborative process. To address this matter, we have referred to the work of Scott (1975), Sanderson (2005), and Chaudhuri (2013). Specifically, in the context of television,

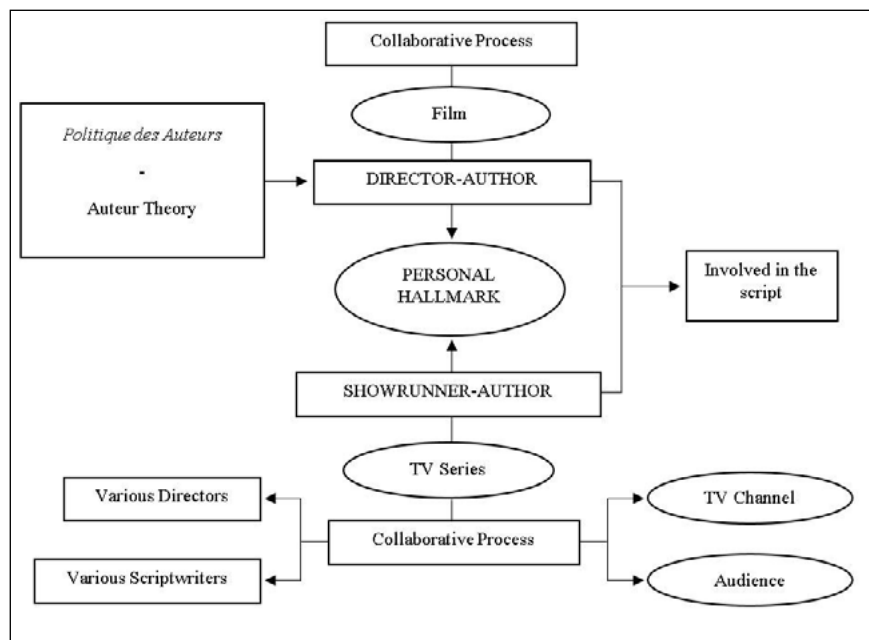
Thompson and Burns' book (1990) is considered essential, as well as the research carried out by Cantor and Cantor (1992), Kubey (2009), Mann (2009), Kompare (2011), and Blakey (2017).

Secondly, the study focuses on the vast literature concerning the French *Politique des Auteurs*, through the volumes that compile papers and interviews published in *Cahiers du Cinéma* (Santos-Fontenla, 1974; Baecque, 2003; Romaguera and Alsina, 2010). Furthermore, we analyze the investigations conducted by Sarris (1962, 1967, 1968) and Wollen (1969), which developed this paradigm in North America, where it was called 'auteur theory' –we use the term '*politique*' or 'theory' depending on the context–.

Finally, in order to focus on television authorship, we have considered those authors that examine this issue, such as Dunne (2007), Lotz (2009), Hadas (2014), Schatz (2014), Steiner (2015), Benschhoff (2016), and Fisk and Szalay (2017). At this point, the book *Companion to Media Authorship* by Gray and Johnson (2013) is a crucial reference. Likewise, the texts by Newman and Levine (2012), and Mittell (2015) are especially relevant.

This bibliographic review allows us to synthesize the connections between the *Politique des Auteurs* and the *showrunner as auteur* through the following scheme. Its content has led to the subsequent critical analysis of each concept.

Figure 1: Connections between Film and Television Authorship.



Source: Compilation based on information supplied by the bibliographic review.

The findings are presented in three content areas. The first two preliminary sections explain the premise that television production is a collaborative process, and show the main contributions about film authorship made by French critics and North American theorists. The third part analyses and studies the application of the auteur theory to television media, highlighting the authorship dynamics assigned to the executive producer as the head of the fiction TV series.

### 3. Results

#### 3.1. Television production as a collaborative process

Audiovisual production involves a collaborative process where different professionals, together with the equipment and the financial support act. It is collective creativity, which implies the interaction between various members of a team to achieve a single audiovisual work (Scott 1975). Following this statement, Santos-Fontenla (1974: 11) points out that 'for a long time the possibility of the filmmaker to be considered as the "author" of their works has been denied because cinema is teamwork.'<sup>3</sup> In other words, Sanderson (2005) notes that, notwithstanding film directors' responsibility, the participation of a group of people prevents the allocation of film authorship to just one person.

With regards to television media specifically, the implication of different persons is even more marked in the fiction series production process. It makes the task of identifying its authorship difficult (Newcomb and Alley, 1983; Mittell, 2015; Jensen, 2017). Campbell and Reeves (1990: 8) express that 'it's a mistake to think of television authorship solely regarding the expression of an individual's artistic vision.' Likewise, Benshoff (2016) observes the complexity of distinguishing the author in these audiovisual projects, which are written by a group of screenwriters and directed by various directors, including TV channel managers, who are also influenced by the channel's brand itself.

However, despite the criticism of individual authorship, this perspective does not impede the allocation of an authorial voice to an individual or a creative team, where the executive producer is included (Mann, 2009; Tous-Rovirosa, 2009; Blakey, 2017). In the cinematographic context, 'it may be the case that in a film the producer has the right to be considered as much an author of the resulting work as the director or the screenwriter. However, it is understandable only if we consider the cinema as a creative and collective work, a collaborative art'<sup>4</sup> (Pardo, 2000: 247). As for the television industry, Guerrero (2013) expresses that 'the audiovisual production is considered fundamentally a teamwork where the executive producer takes the lead'<sup>5</sup> (48); and Newman and Levine (2012: 38) append that 'television shows [...] are authored by the people who create them, whether these authors are understood to function as autonomous individuals or as a team of collaborators working together.'

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3 Original text: 'Durante mucho tiempo se ha negado al cineasta la posibilidad de ser considerado "autor" de sus obras en virtud de tratarse el cine de un trabajo en equipo' (Santos-Fontenla, 1974: 11). Own translation.

4 Original text: 'darse el caso de una película donde el productor tenga derecho a ser considerado tan autor de la obra resultante como el director o el guionista. Ahora bien, esto solo se entiende desde la consideración del cine como un trabajo creativo conjunto, un arte colaborativo' (Pardo, 2000: 247). Own translation.

5 Original text: 'la producción audiovisual se considera, fundamentalmente, un trabajo en equipo cuyo liderazgo es asumido por el productor ejecutivo' (Guerrero, 2013: 48). Own translation.

Thus, television authorship is understood and analyzed in a collaborative context, where 'the television author must coordinate and facilitate the concerted efforts of a large and complex team' (Campbell and Reeves, 1990: 14). The executive producer is the person who must develop such a job: exercising the highest degree of responsibility in the project and making decisions regarding each production phase (Thompson and Burns, 1990). In this way, 'the final product of an aired episode goes through the complex collaborative process, filtering the contributions of performers, designers, editors, and network executives, but the responsibility for the end product rests with the showrunner' (Mittell, 2015: 91).

This professional must also select and establish a narrative, aesthetic, and thematic line –known as the *showrunner's voice* (Bennett, 2014; Kirkpatrick, 2015)–, and to ensure its consistency during each TV series episode (Newcomb and Alley, 1983; Perren, 2011; Newman and Levine, 2012). The objective is to prevent pressure exerted by agents involved from distorting the original version (Kubey, 2009).

In this point, it is essential to highlight the audiovisual authorship from a legal perspective, which is particularly complex due to the lack of homogeneous legal standards about intellectual property at international level. There are two different legal systems: Anglo-Saxon system –mainly EE.UU. and Britain–, and Latin system –where Spain is included–. This means that there are different considerations regarding copyright and intellectual property (Pardo, 2009). In the first case, 'the producer is the copyright owner, this modality is more advantageous and modern for the industry'<sup>6</sup> (Sáinz-Sánchez, 1999: 100). With reference to the Spanish legislation, the director, the screenwriter<sup>7</sup>, and the musical composer are considered authors of the audiovisual project, and they have moral rights. For his/her part, the audiovisual producer has property rights: commercialization and remuneration (Pardo, 2014). This law makes the difference between the concept of 'collaborative work' –Spanish system– where several authors are the copyright co-owners–; and of 'collective work' –a concept closer to Anglo-Saxon mentality– where a single person –the producer– coordinates the contributions of several authors, and he/she is the copyright owner (Pardo, 2009).

On the other hand, multiple studies consider the possibility of connecting authorship with other related factors: the TV channel and the spectator. The former exercises constant supervision over the fiction series production, taking the final decision about its emission (Cantor, 1988; Kubey, 2009). Therefore, a positive relationship between the showrunner and the TV channel executives is essential for the quality of the project (Campbell and Reeves, 1990). Moreover, we should note several parameters set by this agent –tone, content, and genre–, to determine the projects that they finance and show, and therefore, to attract a specific type of audience (Hills, 2013). These features allow for the configuration of a brand identity linked with the authorial style present in the TV series broadcasted by each channel, especially across their original contents (Johnson, 2013; Mittell, 2015).

The traditional American networks –ABC, NBC, and CBS– have started to change their production model in this sense. Nevertheless, it was the cable channels –in particular, HBO– that originally searched for a brand image. 'HBO is the

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6 Original text: 'el productor es el titular último de los derechos de autor sobre la obra audiovisual, modalidad sin duda más ventajosa para la industria y claramente más moderna' (Sáinz-Sánchez, 1999: 100). Own translation.

7 In this context we have to remember that most of the time the showrunner is also a writer.

“author” of its TV shows, together with the authorial signatures canonically recognized. It is no longer only important that they are *a show from* or *created by*, but it is also important that they are *Original HBO Programming*<sup>8</sup> (Maio, 2011: 279).

Additionally, we perceive more creative freedom and authorial autonomy allowed by cable channels in the contemporary era (Tous-Rovirosa, 2009; Perren, 2011; Dunleavy, 2018). Following this idea, Steiner asserts:

Although it [cable network HBO’s] did not invent putting the focus of attention on one showrunner-auteur, the network has made it an art form in itself to build a public image of a creative haven promising quality, where writers are provided with a maximum of support and a minimum of interference (Steiner, 2015: 183).

However, ‘even if showrunners may have fewer voices to answer to in cable, they still must negotiate with the entities that finance, distribute, and market their programs’ (Perren, 2011: 138), to adjust their content to the parameters demanded by each TV channel.

Concerning the audience, the spectator gets involved in the television project through the transmedia options, the interaction with the showrunner, and the participation in the creation of content thanks to Internet technology and social networks. These opportunities open a new way for the *co-creation* of TV series in the digital era (Gray and Johnson, 2013).

### 3.2. *The Politique des Auteurs*

The *Politique des Auteurs* was promoted and encouraged within a French cultural and social context, where several film magazines, cine-clubs, film libraries, and film festivals were developed (Stam, 2001). This movement has its origin in the *Nouvelle Vague* or *French New Wave* and, specifically, in a group of filmmakers and critics who were members of the film magazine *Cahiers du Cinéma*. The main promoter of this paradigm was François Truffaut, who published *A certain tendency in French cinema –Une certain tendance du cinema français–* in 1954, where he coined and explained the characteristics of the *Politique des Auteurs*. The main premise is that the director, as the author of the film, expresses a personal view by using a particular style during filmmaking (Chaudhuri, 2013). It is valued by the *mise-en-scene* as a tool for leaving one’s mark on the project (Santos-Fontenla, 1974). Therefore, the *How do you say?* is the reflection of the author’s action and personality (Casetti, 1994; Stam, 2001). The *Cahiers du Cinéma*’s journals appreciate the film aesthetic over its theme, and ‘the author becomes more important than the film. The signature certifies the value of the work and guarantees its quality’ (Casetti, 1994: 96). At this point, Truffaut shares that ‘there are no good and bad movies, only good and bad directors’ (Chaudhuri, 2013: 80).

This author remarks that the style applied by the film director becomes a reiterative factor during their entire work. It demonstrates continuity and allows the public and critics to easily recognize these imprints (Scott, 1975; Stam, 2001). The creative hallmarks are considered ‘as testimonies from a vision, an individual personality’<sup>9</sup> (Galindo-Pérez, 2015:

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8 Original text: ‘HBO si fa “autore” dei propri programmi affiancandosi alle firme autoriali canonicamente riconosciute. Non è più solo importante che sia un programma di o creato da; è importante che sia un HBO Original Programming’ (Maio, 2011: 279). Own translation.

9 Original text: ‘Como testimonios de una visión, de una personalidad individual’ (Galindo-Pérez, 2015: 53). Own translation.

53). Additionally, in order to understand the director's activity, we should highlight their relationship with the film script, in other words, they have the competency and authority to change dialogues and scenes during the shooting phase (Chaudhuri, 2013).

Subsequently, Eric Rohmer published the article *The readers of 'Cahiers' and the Politique des Auteurs – Les lecteurs des 'Cahiers' et la Politique des Auteurs*– (1956) to study the above issues (Pellejero, 2012). Besides, he demonstrates the admiration for North American filmmakers in *Rediscovering American – Redécouvrir l'Amérique*– (1955), claiming the following, 'If I had to characterize the American style of cinema, I would put forward the two words: efficacy and elegance' (Rohmer, [1955] 1985: 89). *The Cahiers du Cinéma's* critic thought that the Hollywood directors, despite working in the studio system, were authors who applied stylistic and personal thematic elements to their films (Benshoff, 2016).

Another outstanding contribution is the article written by Alexandre Astruc: *The Birth of a New Avant-Garde: 'la caméra-stylo' – Du Stylo à la caméra et de la caméra au stylo*– ([1948] 1999). This author insists on the freedom of expression given by the film industry, and compares directors' functions to writers', and the film camera to the fountain pen. Astruc ([1948] 1999) initiates a debate about scriptwriters' and directors' competences, and defends that the ideal situation is that in which both profiles are developed by the same person. This means, 'both as a vehicle for a more "personal" cinema and as a pathway to more and more complex arguments for a language of the cinema comparable to a literary language' (Corrigan, 1999: 52).

On the other hand, the *Politique des Auteurs* have endured criticism resulting from excesses when the films directed by professionals who are not considered authors are denied and neglected, and those works signed by respected names are defended without assessing their findings in an objective manner (Santos-Fontenla, 1974). André Bazin, co-founder of the *Cahiers*, was the main advocate for this idea. He explains it in the article *On the Politique des Auteurs – De la Politique des Auteurs*– ([1957] 2003), where he affirms that 'there is no reason why there should not be –and sometimes there are– flashes in the pan in the work of otherwise mediocre film-makers' (Bazin, [1957] 2003: 97). Bazin remains 'distanced from the authorial frenzy that characterized his pupils' texts'<sup>10</sup> (Galindo-Pérez, 2015: 54), and he suggests focusing more attention on other elements, such as the text, the context, and the theme:

To a certain extent at least, auteurs are a subject unto themselves. Whatever the scenario, they always tell the same story, or, in case the word "story" is confusing, let's say they have the same attitude and pass the same moral judgements on the action and the characters (Bazin, [1957] 2003: 101).

From another angle, it is crucial to study the scope of the *Politique des Auteurs* in the North American context. This phenomenon took place during the 1960s, thanks to Andrew Sarris ([1962] 1974), a journalist for *The Village Voice*. The author changed the term '*politique*' to 'theory' in order to prevent conflicts (Cuevas, 1994; Pellejero, 2012), but afterward, he had to clarify that the paradigm refers to an attitude understood as a set of values (Sarris, 1968). Likewise, he supports the renewed concept of the film director as an artist, and points out that they do not have opponents during the audiovisual creative process, even if they work in the studio system (Sarris, 1967).

In *Notes on the Auteur Theory in 1962*, Sarris presents three premises for accepting a director as an author:

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<sup>10</sup> Original text: 'Distanciado del furor autoral del que sus pupilos hacen gala en sus textos' (Galindo-Pérez, 2015: 54). Own translation.



The first premise of the auteur theory is the technical competence of a director as a criterion of value. [...] The second premise of the auteur theory is the distinguishable personality of the director as a criterion of value. Over a group of films, a director must exhibit certain recurrent characteristics of style, which serve as his signature. [...] The third and ultimate premise of the auteur theory is concerned with interior meaning, and ultimate glory of the cinema as an art. Interior meaning is extrapolated from the tension between a director's personality and his material (Sarris, [1962] 1974: 562).

Subsequently, the British Peter Wollen, in the chapter *Auteur Theory – Signs and Meaning in the Cinema–* (1969) applied the structuralism and semiotic theories to the identity of the director. This critic supports his study based on the relationship between singularity and universality. In other words, by observing the general characteristics in an author's audiovisual work and, at the same time, the varying themes in each film (Stam, 2001; Pellejero, 2012; Galindo-Pérez, 2015). From this point of view, Wollen (1969) analyses the professional career of directors such as Howard Hawks or John Ford, and claims that 'the important thing to stress, however, is that it is only the analysis of the whole corpus which permits the moment of synthesis when the critic returns to the individual film' (Wollen, 1969: 104). In this way, he intended to 'strengthen the validity of the authorial approach with a more objective and scientific substantiation, to root out the subjectivism, which sometimes discredits previous texts from critics of authorship'<sup>11</sup> (Cuevas, 1994: 157). Finally, several factors related to literary authorship are worth noting. Roland Barthes ([1968] 1987) and Michel Foucault ([1969] 1999) developed these notions, which would subsequently be incorporated in the cinema field (Galindo-Pérez, 2015).

Roland Barthes presented his criticism in *The Death of the Author – La mort de l'auteur–* ([1968] 1987), highlighting that the act of writing destroys the identity of those that write, the possible authors. This author remarks the consideration of authorship as a mark of prestige, and acknowledges that the work's explanation is always sought in who created it, 'the image of literature to be found in contemporary culture is tyrannically centered on the author, his person, his history, his tastes, his passions' (Barthes, [1968] 1987: 66).

Michel Foucault expressed that what is important is not to study the absence of the author, but to know its consequences through the functions and relationship to the text. In the conference entitled *What is an Author? – Qu'est -ce qu'un auteur?–* Foucault ([1969] 1999: 329-360) allocates the authorship to the person who says or writes the speech. However, he warns of the existence of complex actions to achieve the cited attribution and notes four functions of an author in connection with the text:

1. The 'author' as a 'function' of discourse involves the appropriation of the text, as well as responding to its consequences.
2. The 'author-function' changes according to the speech and its historical moment, and it contributes to the credibility.
3. The 'author-function' includes a group of features presented in the text, they are signs that refer to the author.
4. The 'author-function' implies the existence of a plurality of egos in the text, which Foucault called a 'fictional narrator'.

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<sup>11</sup> Original text: 'Reforzar la validez del enfoque autorista, dándole una fundamentación más objetiva, más científica, que lograra erradicar los subjetivismos que muchas veces lastraban los intentos de los anteriores críticos de autor' (Cuevas, 1994: 157). Own translation.

### 3.3. *The authorship in television*

The cited studies allow us to assert that the auteur theory reclaimed the power and rights of the film director at the expense of the executive producer's. Nevertheless, other texts prove that, during the *Hollywood Studios Era*, there were executive producers whose creative intervention in the films was decisive to their final result (Kubey, 2009). In this vein, Benshoff (2016: 66) expresses that 'it was the producer who was the most important man on the production, overseeing all aspects of a project and reporting to the studio bosses.'

David O. Selznick is an example of this executive-creative producer profile because he became recognized as co-author of his audiovisual work (Pardo, 2000; Stam, 2001; Romaguera y Alsina, 2010; Benshoff, 2016). Selznick asserted in a conference at Columbia University (1937) –subsequently published in the book *MEMO from David O. Selznick* (Behlmer, 1972)– that the producer must be able to re-write and re-edit a scene if this is necessary, as well as guide the director to shoot it, without criticizing other professionals' actions. In this sense, Selznick had 'a deep awareness of the creative character of his profession'<sup>12</sup> (Pardo, 2009: 48).

Following this premise, the consideration of the executive producer as the author found its maximum expression in the television industry, particularly in fiction series production. Therefore, 'the auteur theory [...] had to be modified in its television application' (Stam, 2001: 113). In general terms, scholars agree on allocating this authorship to the executive producer –Steven Bochco, J.J. Abrams or Joss Whedon– who take the greatest responsibility for TV series production, through the supervision of the different stages of the process (Newcomb and Alley, 1983; Caldwell, 1995; Lotz, 2009; Mann, 2009; Mittell, 2015; Perren and Schatz, 2015; Dunleavy, 2018). In this sense, Kubey affirms:

In television, the producer is the key creative force- the producer creates and runs the show, and it is the producer who, more than anyone else, with rare exception, is the creative mind and manager behind a series and its programs (Kubey, 2009: 18-19).

For its part, in the Spanish historical context, there are also several television fiction producers –Jaime de Armiñán, Narciso Ibáñez Serrador, Adolfo Marsillach or Antonio Mercero– who developed a great job in writing, production and direction, and for this reason they are considered authors of the Spanish television (García de Castro, 2002; Diego, 2010). In the last decade, we can mention, among other professionals, Javier Olivares –creator of *El Ministerio del Tiempo*– (Cascajosa, 2015).

It is noteworthy that television studies link authorship to an executive-creative producer (Mann, 2009; Mittell, 2015), who receives the unofficial title of showrunner in the contemporary era (Schatz, 2014). Kompere (2011: 98) defines these professionals as 'writer-producers who oversaw and managed the production of the medium's primary aesthetic form, the primetime serial.' According to these ideas, Steiner (2015: 183) claims that 'nowadays, authorship in television is often intrinsically tied to the showrunner, a position on top of a television drama's production hierarchy that is also variable labelled "showrunner-auteur", "writer-producer", or "hyphenate" of a TV show.' Thus, despite the collaborative nature of the process:

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<sup>12</sup> Original text: 'una profunda conciencia del carácter creativo de su profesión' (Pardo, 2009: 48). Own translation.

When the term *auteur* is invoked about television, it is usually used to describe the writer-producer-creator of a given series, more so than the various writers and directors who might work on the show over the course of several years (Benshoff, 2016: 63-64).

However, it is not exact to use the term ‘showrunner’ as synonymous with television author, because this analogy is not always fulfilled (Blakey, 2017). We must note the original creation of the project to assess its authorship since ‘only in certain forms of television production do we observe the elevation of showrunner to the status of *auteur*’ (Newman and Levine 2012: 39). To this point, Gray and Johnson (2013: 3) add that ‘the author as figure is often posited as the individual who created the product, he or she who can variously be thanked or blamed, and he or she who then “gave” it to us.’ So that ‘very different views of authorship are a function of the distinct modes of production involved’ (Schatz, 2014: 42).

On the other hand, as previously mentioned, the *auteur* theory ascribes the competence of applying a personal mark to the director’s films, and thus, to configure a unique style throughout their audiovisual career (Cuevas, 1994). Nevertheless, in the television media the director’s creativity is limited, and ‘television directors have little opportunity to put their stamp on an individual program. Indeed, they are encouraged not to put a stamp on a program, it ought not to stand out as different from the series work already established’ (Kubey, 2009: 225). In this case, this responsibility is developed by the showrunner. He/she is in charge of setting a pattern –narrative, aesthetic and thematic– and keeping the consistency and integrity of this vision during the evolution of the TV series (Hadas, 2014; Benshoff, 2016; Dunne, 2017; Dunleavy, 2018). Cantor (1988: 111) relates this task to the concept of ‘quality control’: ‘Quality control does not necessarily refer just to artistic aspects of the film, but also includes making the series consistent by keeping the stories within the general series concept.’ On their part, Campbell and Reeves (1990: 9) suggest that the stamp of this executive producer is present during three parts of the show’s production: ‘The cultural orientation, the cinematic look, and the writing philosophy.’ The cited issues are the result of a personal and autobiographic style that might be evident in different television projects produced by the same showrunner (Newman and Levine, 2012; Blakey, 2017).

Likewise, we must highlight the intervention of the professional in the screenwriting department (Schatz, 2014), because ‘the marriage of writer and producer is key in producing the one-hour drama’ (Dunne, 2007: 99). The showrunners understand this teamwork perfectly well, where they usually come from (Cantor, 1988; Cantor and Cantor, 1992; García-Fanlo, 2016; Fisk and Szalay, 2017). Hence, generally, it could be stated that ‘the greatest authorial expression lies primarily with the writer creating the series, they are usually the one who maintains the creative control, as an executive producer’<sup>13</sup> (García-Martínez, 2014: 23). The writing process is considered crucial regarding the creative vision (Mittell, 2015; Dunleavy, 2018), and, through the job performed by this writer-producer, we can find connections between literature authorship and audiovisual authorship (Corrigan, 1999; Fisk and Szalay, 2017).

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13 Original text: ‘El mayor impulso autoral recae en el guionista que idea la serie; él es quien, habitualmente, mantiene el control creativo ejerciendo como productor ejecutivo’ (García-Martínez, 2014: 23). Own translation.

However, their conduct towards the writing department is not the only task that the executive-creative producer must develop. In short, this professional carries out three fundamental functions: establishing the narrative lines and supervising their evolution, maintaining contact with the TV channel executives, and applying a production model in line with the company's economic conditions (Cantor, 1988). So, although the consideration of showrunner as television author is closely associated with the control over the creative side of the production –script, casting, editing– (Cantor and Cantor, 1992), it is also necessary to emphasize the responsibilities concerning matters connected with the economic management of the television project (Mittell, 2015). Gray and Johnson specify both aspects:

The author is a node through which discourses of beauty, truth, meaning, and value must travel, while also being a node through which money, power, labour, and the control of culture must travel, and while frequently serving as the mediating figure standing between large organizations and the audience (Gray and Johnson, 2013: 4).

Finally, it is worth noting several consequences of television authorship on the promotion and distribution of the TV series (Blakey, 2017; Jensen, 2017). Mittell (2015: 98) declares that 'the authorship frequently functions as a marker of distinction', and Steiner (2015: 183) adds that 'the showrunner-auteur acts as a perceived guarantor of art.' In this sense, Caldwell (1995: 14) confirms that 'part of the emergence of the quality myth in 1980s television was that television was no longer simply anonymous as many theorists had suggested.' Newman and Levine (2012) study this issue as a tool for legitimizing television media from a cultural perspective. On their part, Gray and Johnson (2013: 6) expose: 'Authorship is therefore not just a question of art and individual expression, but also of social and institutional structures that govern cultural production, enabling, compelling, and authorizing some forms while constraining others.'

The executive producer's authorial signature contributes to the creation of a reputation, which is used in the marketing strategy developed during future projects. The name *–from the creator of–* is employed as an advertising slogan to create some expectations in the audience (Newman and Levine, 2012; Mittell, 2015; Jensen, 2017), or unifying different products belonging to the same transmedia universe (Hadas, 2014). The goal is to apply a promotional model based on the quality and distinction surrounding the TV series author, and thus to compete with the content produced by other TV channels (Newman and Levine, 2012).

Moreover, the showrunner's visibility –interviews, conventions, conferences– as part of the TV series' advertising and dissemination process, allows for the comparison between television media with literature or cinema from this promotional perspective (Newman and Levine, 2012). In this point, the showrunner's duties are not yet completed with the final project emission, but they have to interact and participate in activities in different media and social networks, as well as supervise the creation of content for TV shows, websites, and TV series' DVDs (Mann, 2009; Hills, 2013; Mittell, 2015; Perren and Schatz, 2015; Steiner, 2015).

#### 4. Conclusions

Research findings regarding television production authorship, through the *Politique des Auteurs*, and its subsequent application to the television media, allow us to draw a series of conclusions. In this sense, we stress the consideration of the executive-creative producer as the fiction TV series author, as well as the functions and involvement in the production process from an authorial perspective.

Firstly, the allocation of authorship is a complex task that has been studied in different media –literature, cinema, television–, which are significantly influenced by each other. Likewise, the cultural and social context has a decisive impact on this issue. Besides, we must understand authorship within the collaborative system that audiovisual production implies. However, it does not prevent the existence of an individual author.

Authorship criticism in the television industry is aimed at the fact that it is a job in which different professionals take part, together with the technical and economic issues, and the intervention of channel TV executives and the audience. All this impedes the easy identification of an individual author. Nevertheless, the theories concerning cinema and television studies reveal that this idea may not necessarily imply that there is not a person in charge of leading the rest of the workers' performance, and managing the project authorship. Thus, this profile exercises the utmost responsibility for the creation and development of the TV series, and he/she applies a creative personal vision, ensuring that it remains consistent throughout the whole production process. In the film industry, the director usually develops this role. But, in television media, it is more common to allocate authorship to the TV series executive-creative producer, also known as the showrunner in the contemporary era.

In both media, the studies highlight the significance of the personal stamp that the author applies to their audiovisual work. This mark is typically reiterative during their career, and, if the audience recognizes it, it allows for the creation of a series of expectations about future projects. It is essential that this vision is not distorted by the members of each department, which is especially important in TV series production because they are composed of several episodes written and directed by different professionals. Therefore, the showrunner, whether creating the original idea or not, has to maintain this concept in order to have a positive impact on the quality of the product.

On the other hand, the popularity acquired by fiction TV series in the twenty-first century has favored television media legitimation from a cultural perspective, thanks to the existence of the cited authorship gained by this executive producer. The showrunner's activity for the promotion and marketing strategies, the relationships with the audience through social networks and transmedia options, and the TV channel intervention in the creation of a brand image have a notable influence on the social and cultural configuration of fiction TV series as a quality product.

From the data studied, we take the literature and film authorship as a reference to assess the consideration of the showrunner as an author, highlighting the supervision of the entire production process. In particular, we emphasize their functions in the writing department –which combines this profile with the literary author–, as well as the control they develop during the shooting and editing –just like the film director–. On this point, together with the study of the executive-creative producer's competences during the production process, we propose the possibility of examining authorship through the analysis of specific TV series and its narrative, aesthetic, and thematic authorial

hallmark leading to an interesting discussion regarding these notions, as well as the possibility of focusing on future applications.

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