Variations on the cliffhanger: serial narrative and consumption

Variações sobre o cliffhanger: narrativa seriada e consumo

Márcio Serelle

Resumo: *Neste artigo, investigo o recurso do cliffhanger como um dos elementos distintivos da forma seriada. Da literatura às séries audiovisuais, o cliffhanger tem sido utilizado para administrar o desejo do público, levando-o a consumir o próximo episódio, prolongando o prazer narrativo. Abordo as dualidades e os sentidos desse recurso e a permanência e a atualização da técnica nas séries contemporâneas, cujo contexto de distribuição e lançamento muitas vezes abole o tempo de espera entre os episódios. A análise dos exemplos demonstra que, nas séries atuais, o cliffhanger é um expediente que permite a exploração da complexidade narrativa e um modo autoconsciente e irônico de se jogar com o espectador.*

Palavras-chave: *Streaming; Narrativa Seriada; Consumo; Cliffhanger.*

Abstract: *In this article, I investigate the cliffhanger as one of the distinctive elements of the serial form. From literature to audiovisual series, the cliffhanger has been used to manage the audience's desire, leading them to consume the next episode and prolonging the narrative pleasure. I address the dualities and meanings of this feature and the permanence and updating of the technique in contemporary series, whose distribution and release context often abolishes the pending time between episodes. The example analysis demonstrates that, in current series, the cliffhanger is a device that allows the exploration of narrative complexity and a self-conscious and ironic way of playing with the viewer.*

Palavras-chave: *streaming; serial narrative; consume; cliffhanger*

Introduction

In the sixth episode of the series The Book of Boba Fett (2021), which is part of the Star Wars fictional universe, Jedi master Luke Skywalker (Mark Hamill) offers Grogu two options: gain the knowledge of light, which belongs to Yoda, or a Beskar armor, an extremely resistant metal alloy, a gift from Mando (Pedro Pascal), the Mandalorian protagonist of the series of the same name that intersects with this one. Grogu will become Skywalker's first Jedi student if he accepts the saber. If he chooses the armor, he must return to his Mandalorian friend. The episode ends with Grogu anguished between options, and the viewer who watched the series during its release period must wait a week to find out what the character decided.

We are faced with a profuse transmedia and trans-fictional narrative (RYAN, 2013; SAINT-GELAIS, 2005) and updated technology, which allows us to insert into Skywalker the face and synthesized voice of its actor at a young age. At the same time, we witness the persistence of an old technique, the cliffhanger or hook – the name given to the resource in Brazil –, which critic Emily Nussbaum (2012) defines as a climax split in half. In her study of the soap opera, Rosane Svartman (2023, p. 46) describes the hook as "a critical scene with high emotional impact: a moment of reconciliation, sadness, revelation, or devastating action – an accident, for example – intentionally cut in the height of the action." A series like Alias recurrently constructs the cliffhanger, as Jason Mittell (2015) describes, through a traditional four-act arc, transferring the final act to the opening minutes of the subsequent episode and prolonging the viewer's pleasure through waiting, encouraging them to follow the fiction.

In this article, I develop a path based on the genesis of this "cutting technique" (ISER, 1989) to investigate the permanence and some variations of the cliffhanger in contemporary series and the meanings linked to the resource in a context of distribution through streaming platforms in which these narratives are no longer necessarily marked by waiting (BUONANNO, 2019). Streaming series seek narrative effects

(MITTELL, 2015) that escape predictable schemes but do not renounce the cliffhanger completely, even if they aim to renew it or even work on it ironically.

This article has three parts besides this introduction and final considerations. First, I recover the initial uses of the cliffhanger in literature and discuss how the resource is a cultural artifice that operates on desire by postponing the reader's pleasure. The technique, as appropriated by the commercial literature of the 19th century, followed the rhythm of the newspaper and attracted, with its dose of suspense, a popular reading public while stimulating a specific type of reading. Next, I address the presence of the cliffhanger in audiovisual serial fiction, the dualities of the device, and its recurring strategies. Compressed assistance is among the current issues raised by streaming platforms, as it can eliminate the gaps that the cutting techniques of serial fiction traditionally provide by meeting the immediacy of contemporary life. Finally, I describe how serial fiction is released today on streaming and analyze some examples of cliffhangers in recent series. The aim is to reflect on the current nature of this resource, its use to transition between layers of a complex narrative, and the ironic awareness in the proposed play with the viewer.

The adoption of the word cliffhanger in English in research on series justifies its use in this paper instead of the term gancho [hook] in Portuguese. The Spaniard Toni de la Torre (2016) refers to cliffhangers as jargon from the world of serial fiction. The expression, which literally refers to the condition of being on the edge of a cliff, derives from a scene in the novel A Pair of Blue Eyes by Thomas Hardy, published in parts in Tinsley's Magazine during 1873. In that story, a character finds himself during a walk at the edge of the abyss at the end of the episode and is saved, in the next episode, by the woman who accompanied him, who tears her clothes to make a rope and rescue him (NUSSBAUM, 2012). The term thus carries, in the image it projects and in its link with Victorian-era literature, a certain degree of suspense and drama serial fiction has explored since then.

The reign of desire

Studies generally locate the matrices of audiovisual serial fiction in the 19th century in the delivery narrative of Victorian England or the French serial novel (cf. DE LA TORRE, 2016; TORRES, 2012). The use of the cliffhanger is much older, however, and dates to Eastern chain narratives, among which the book One Thousand and One Nights, which had its core stories developed in the 8th or 9th century, is the best-known example in the West. The Thousand and One Nights, of Persian and Arabic origin, is a framework narrative that structures a cycle of stories. In the narrative, Sultan Shariar is betrayed by his wife and, convinced of the malice of women, decides to marry virgins and kill them the morning after their wedding night. Scheherazade applies to marry the Sultan to save the women in the kingdom. After the first night, with the Sultan's permission, she tells her sister a story and interrupts it at its most exhilarating moment. The tale arouses the Sultan's curiosity, and he allows Scheherazade to live so that she can continue the story the next night, which she then interrupted again to resume the next day. Scheherazade repeats the strategy for a thousand and one nights until the Sultan, transformed by the narratives, gives up on killing her and suspends the barbarism.

The interruptions in the stories transition to the framework narrative, in which we have the meetings and dialogues between Shariar and Scheherazade. "Here, the technique of interruption is used to fulfill one of the main functions of literature: the connection of fictional worlds to the realistic world, from representation to reality, from allegory to life experience" (LEEUWEN, 2007, p. 7). This genre, known as the mirror for princes, is situated between entertainment and pedagogy, as the situations and images of good and evil represented in the tales were also aimed at preparing rulers. (LEEUWEN, 2007).

In the well-known essay in which he affirms the impurity of cinematographic art, André Bazin (2018) comments on how the slicing of stories in episodic films from the beginning of the 20th century is due to

the strategies of the serial novel. However, Bazin develops his reflection from One Thousand and One Nights:

> If Scheherazade had told everything at once, the king, as cruel as the public, would have had her executed at dawn. Both need to feel the power of enchantment due to its interruption, to savor the delicious wait of the tale that replaces everyday life, which is nothing more than the solution to the continuity of the dream. (BAZIN, 2018, p. 129)

The cliffhanger is a narrative technique that seduces the audience and moves them from the position of executioner – the one who can decide the fate of a film – to that of a captive. The viewer's involvement conditions the survival of the series. (In the case of Sultan Shariar, it is necessary to ensure that he continues to listen so that he is transformed by the power of the narrative. That is Scheherazade's plan). The interruption of the story highlights the fictional fascination subjugating the audience. The public is left to wait for the new part, which, for Bazin, is a form of waiting experienced as fun in anticipation of the dream continuing.

"Satisfying curiosity for the Sultan means pleasure. Postponing it means culture," says literary critic Adélia Bezerra de Meneses (1987, p. 120), possibly based on the Freudian notion of postponing pleasure. As Leeuwen (2007) points out, many interpretations of One Thousand and One Nights refer to psychoanalysis and produce readings that identify in Shariar the man governed by desire, the Id, and in Scheherazade, the Ego, which balances reason and passion and adjusts us to the principle of reality. For Meneses (1987, p. 120), "one of the things that differentiate the man from the animal is exactly the postponement of pleasure." Scheherazade skillfully manages Shariar's desire. "Her suspense technique" (MENESES, 1987, p. 120) involves the Sultan.

The management of desire through the narrative techniques of seduction was turned into a business by the serials and other forms of

delivered fiction of the 19th century, a context in which a market for literary entertainment emerged with a broader audience. Conservative critics at the time disparaged the dosed form, which met the newspaper's demands, accusing the serial of being industrialized literature (MEYER, 1996).

Among the various resources of this nineteenth-century fiction, which radio and television series incorporated in the 20th century, Toni de la Torre (2016) indicates the cliffhanger as the most significant device to generate suspense and retain the viewer. As in the motto of Wilkie Collins, a writer from Victorian England, the serial narrative should make the reader laugh, cry, and hope. Collins "was known for the psychological portrait of his characters but also for his complex plots, which always left the reader hanging on the resolution of a scene" (DE LA TORRE, 2016, p. 15-16, our translation).

The narrative structure of the serial aims to win over the popular reader habituated to brief forms. The fragmented text enables the uninitiated reader to move from the short story to the more intricate plot of the novel. For Jesús Martín-Barbero (2003), one of the seductive elements of the genre is the interruption and suspense produced by the cliffhanger, which develops through the balance between surprise and planned redundancy. "Each episode must be able to capture the attention of the reader who, through it, has their first contact with the narrative and must at the same time sustain the interest of those who have already been following it for months: it must continually surprise, but without confusing the reader." (MARTÍN-BARBERO, 2003, p. 194).

Suspense is an effect of the narration and not of a language that turns on itself, considers Martín-Barbero (2003). Just as popular narration marks the presence of a listener, the serial involves its readers. The pauses between episodes invite them to fill in the gaps in the story. If this form of reading breaks with the aesthetic enjoyment of the work, as 19th-century critics maintained (MEYER, 1996), it demands a specific type of participation from the reader. For Wolfgang Iser (1989. p. 11), the cliffhanger is an editing technique that encourages the reader

to imagine how the action will unfold. "How is it going to go on? In asking this question, we automatically raise the degree of our own partici-pation in the further progress of the action. Dickens was well aware of this fact, and that is why he considered his readers to be coauthors." (ISER, 1989, p. 11). If every text relies on the reader's collaboration to fill in indeterminacies, serial fiction, according to Iser (1989), proposes an even more active role for the public, as it strategically provides them with additional gaps.

From serial cinema to streaming

Audiovisual entertainment explored the resource for the first time in serial cinema in the first half of the 20th century. Like in serials, the imperative was marketing: to make the viewer return to the following week's matinee. In the emergence of the film industry, the serial form established a safe bridge between the first short films and the feature films. For Scott Higgins (2016, p. 73), the cliffhanger gave rise, out of commercial motivation, to "[…] a unique blend of experiences unavailable in other popular cinema: spectacular cataclysm, engaging suspense, and the parameters of an inescapable dilemma left unresolved for an entire week."

Higgins exposes some dualities of the resource, the main one being the fact that the cliffhanger at the same time traps spectators in the events of the story, submerging them in the film plot and making them aware of the mechanisms of the narrative since the forced interruption denounces the artificiality of the serial condition. Niklas Luhmann (2005) considers that the gimmick must not draw attention for a reader or spectator to indulge in entertainment. Production mechanisms must fade so the observer can focus on the fictional experiences. Against this, the cliffhanger operates as a link between the story events and the gimmick, between transparency and opacity, providing the spectator with a double pleasure related to the act of following the narrative and the perception of the narrative mechanisms. As Higgins (2016, p. 84) describes, "While we are engaged in weighing the possibilities of the hero's

survival at one level, at another we identify the game being played and anticipate (even appreciate) the cliffhanger's contrivances."

The examples of cliffhangers described by Higgins in serial films are mostly narratives interrupted at moments when the lives of the protagonists are in danger. The interruption point is a little beyond the moment in which the threat presents itself because, in these films, according to Higgins, the device does not leave the hero hanging on the cliff but pushes him towards the (almost) fall. Accustomed to the formula, the spectator knows that the heroes will save themselves. Therefore, the appropriate question that voice-overs can even verbalize at the end of episodes is "how."

The solution to saving the hero is often beyond the possibilities highlighted in the sequence. However, as Higgins points out, the answer to the outcome must appear among hypotheses that the viewer can elaborate from the narrative so that it does not seem like cheating. Higgins considers, in dialogue with Gerrig's (1996) reflections on suspense, that, despite being formulaic, the cliffhanger is effective due to the resilient nature of the type of emotion it provokes, capable of involving us even when we know that the episodes are, invariably, structured for this final interruption, with a favorable outcome – but which may bring consequences not yet foreseen – in the subsequent episode. As the author proposes, the fact we know the protagonist will not die does not relieve us of the fear that he will die or the apprehension about the consequences arising from extreme situations. In contemporary series, we can also argue that, although the protagonist often prevails, there is no longer a guarantee of the survival of core characters since this stability has been subverted to make the plot more unpredictable (MITTELL, 2015).

The cliffhanger in serial films, as in serial narratives in general, aims to build the wait, which begins as dramatic excitement and extends into a period of prolonged pleasure. The device reinforces the continuity and consumption of the new part in an explicit market relationship. "Cliffhangers are the point when the audience decides to keep buying,"

states Nussbaum (2012, p. 3), who considers the device a blatantly manipulative test of the relationship between creators and audiences.

The cliffhanger became ritualistic in soap operas and telenovelas. In the Brazilian case, the fact that telenovelas are, since their origins, indebted to the French serials and radio soap operas made the cliffhanger one of the crucial narrative devices of these fictions (SVARTMAN, 2023). Brazilian telenovela author Aguinaldo Silva considers that telling a story in chapters is like a "set-up game" that always takes the viewer to the next part, whether a section or a chapter (FIUZA; RIBEIRO, 2009). Aguinaldo Silva's ability to create hooks, initially in miniseries, led to his recognition and hiring as a telenovela writer.

The cliffhanger and its waiting rhythm are a seduction device that constitutes the identity of serial fiction. But how can the device survive in the streaming era, where platforms often make all episodes available at once and encourage viewers to "marathon" and eliminate the wait? Given this context, Milly Buonanno (2019) questions whether what she calls the Netflix paradigm does not cause a break with the serial form. For the author, compressed assistance leads to the loss of the "dialectical pattern" that resides in the overlap between restriction – the power that the work exerts over the reader/spectator/listener by making them wait – and freedom and activity, in the act of imagining possible continuations to the story and filling in the gaps in the text.

"The way we watch affects the form and impacts the hermeneutic processes of creating meaning" (BUONANNO, 2019, p. 48). Buonanno refers, at this point, to the text by Iser (1989), cited previously in this paper, which states that the way we produce meaning in the relationship with a narrative offered to us in parts is different from that in the interaction with a work that presents itself in full, like a novel or film. The forced intervals lead us to speculate about the development of the plot and create narrative possibilities. Like Iser (1989), Buonanno (2019) emphasizes that this does not mean that the fiction that forces us to wait has better quality but that it implies a specific type of fulfillment in which the reader is called upon to play a role.

The reduction in waiting, made possible by the archiving logic of streaming platforms, serves contemporary temporality well. As Emília Araújo (2012) notes, several theorists have pointed out the tendency today towards a more immediate social life. "The number of processes subject to techno-scientific temporality is infinite, which, ultimately, replaces social and biological temporality with mechanical and robotic temporality" (ARAÚJO, 2012, p. 17). That eliminates waiting, which, according to Araújo (2012, p. 11), "is an essential condition for the organization of the social and natural world". According to the author, waiting has several functions in sociability, such as ritualizing passages, providing time for analysis and debate, building expectations, and allowing the cultivation of hope.

Cliffhanger, narrative complexity, and irony

In streaming services, two ways of launching series stand out today, with strategies that combine them. The first, the Netflix paradigm, meets the contemporary immediacy mentioned by Buonnano (2019) and Araújo (2012). The strategy aims for the viewer to go from one episode to another and consume the season in one sitting. The intention is for the viewer to focus their attention on the platform, and, when finishing one series, they move on to another and so on through an algorithmic system that operates, in the case of Netflix, with a profuse catalog. However, a series with all its episodes available at once may not do without the cliffhanger, as the device is important to take the viewer from one chapter to another. What changes significantly is the imposition of the waiting time since the gap may last only a few seconds. Evidently, these conditions refer to an idealized spectatorship willing to "marathon," complying with the platform's strategies.

The second form of release is the one that preserves the intervals, usually a week, between one episode and another, as on HBO Max, the streaming service linked to HBO, and on Disney+. For television critic Maurício Stycer (2022), this strategy increases the "lifespan" of the show since hiatuses fuel conversations between viewers, welding

communities of fans that promote the series. According to Stycer, a successful example was season two of the HBO series Euphoria (2022), which reverberated on socio-digital networks. Season two of White Lotus, aired that same year, is another example of a narrative that generated a lot of speculation among viewers on the social media. For critic Patrícia Kogut (2022), White Lotus, like all good serial narratives, stimulated "a parallel soap opera, written by fans, on social networks."

It is worth noting, however, that even these series released at intervals are later available on streaming services and become part of a catalog. Therefore, it also becomes possible to "marathon" them, which implies another form of relationship with the narrative outside the dynamics foreseen at their release.

As mentioned, there are also hybrid forms of releasing series that combine the first two strategies. The Dropout, released on the Star+ platform in Brazil in 2022, made its first three episodes available simultaneously and released the other five at weekly intervals. Even telenovelas released on streaming, such as Verdades Secretas 2 (2021), today adopt the strategy of releasing episode blocks, which viewers can consume at their own pace.

Given these aspects, relating both to the narrative economy of contemporary series and current forms of distribution and spectatorship, I will address some examples of the use of cliffhangers today. The objective is to expose variations of the technique present in the current series so we can reflect on the persistence of the device, used creatively in conversation with tradition as a trace of seriality, while it is updated, sometimes with ironic awareness, due to changes in the serial form and its circulation.

A first form of cliffhanger that forces the viewer to wait, even when all episodes are available, interrupts the action but does not resolve it in the next episode, as it opens a digression and lets the narrative move away from its central axis and only later find its way back in a type of relationship between episodic and seriality that characterizes the complexity of contemporary fiction (MITTELL, 2015). Episode seven

of The Haunting of Bly Manor, Mike Flanagan's adaptation of the 19th-century novel The Turn of the Screw by Henry James, ends with a frightening scene: the Lady of the Lake, an entity that haunts the property, drags au pair Danielle Clayton by the neck. Episode eight begins by repeating the scene but does not resolve it. Instead, the black screen, which usually follows the action suspended in a cliffhanger, transitions to the origins of the Lady of the Lake, adapted from the short story "The Romance of Certain Old Clothes" by Henry James and inserted into Bly Manor. The end of episode eight also does not resolve the action but returns to the point of tension at the end of episode seven. The outcome will only occur in episode nine, the series finale.

Bly Manor, a Netflix series, knows that "marathoning" demands other interruption strategies to prolong suspense and create waiting time. To manage the viewer's desire, Flanagan makes balanced use of seriality (the progression of the central narrative axis of The Other Turn of the Screw) and the episodic (the mythology of the curse of Bly Manor) with a digression that stands between the violent event and its outcome. The cliffhanger allows the series to move between narrative levels, connect stories, and expand the universe of Bly Manor and its fictional population.

The Last of Us (2023), an HBO series adapted from the video game of the same name, uses a similar procedure from episodes six to eight. At the end of episode six, Joel (Pedro Pascal), who escorts the girl Ellie (Bella Ramsey) in a pandemic and apocalyptic world, is attacked and has his abdomen pierced by a piece of baseball bat. The episode ends with Joel unconscious in the snow while Ellie begs him not to die. Only episode eight lets us know that her guardian survived. Although part seven, "Left Behind," begins with Ellie taking care of Joel, the narrative soon shifts to the past, when the girl lives her relationship with her best friend, Riley (Storm Reid). One night, in a deactivated park, Riley is bitten by an infected person (someone who hosts the fungus that transformed them into a monstrous creature), a painful memory of loss for Ellie. At the end of this story, still in episode seven, we return

to the present of the narrative in which Ellie finds a needle and thread and sews up Joel's belly, who only appears to have recovered at the end of episode eight. "Left Behind" is an adaptation of a story not included in the electronic game version released in 2013 but made available to players as downloadable content (DLC) in 2014.

In this case, the wait was prolonged, given the viewer who watched the show on HBO during its release was already following the weekly viewing rhythm. However, it is worth remembering that, once released, the series enters the logic of the catalog on the HBO streaming service and can be watched at once or in blocks of episodes. Therefore, it is also possible to "marathon" a series like The Last of Us after the release period. What is most important to highlight, however, is that, once again, the cliffhanger serves as a passage between the central axis of seriality and the adjacent episodic narratives, which gain prominence and become linked to a web of stories.

The narrative complexity can also be highlighted in a pilot episode through multiple cliffhangers, as in the Brazilian series Rota 66: A Polícia que Mata (2023). Adapted from the non-fictional book by Caco Barcelos about murders committed by Rondas Ostensivas Tobias de Aguiar in São Paulo, Rota 66 is an example of a series with a mixed release. The first four episodes were available simultaneously on Globoplay (free-to-air TV channel Globo exhibited the first two), and the other four came out weekly.

The pilot, titled "Do Bem e do Mal," leaves three scenes in suspense in a triple cliffhanger: the police approach a family man walking back home, mistaking his umbrella for a gun. Meanwhile, the man's son, not far away, waits at the gate for his arrival. Lunga, one of the young people shot by the police and a potential witness, who is in critical condition in the hospital on life support, wakes up in bed. The doorbell rings, and a woman hands a child to the reporter. "If you forgot you have a child, I came here to remind you," she says. Subsequent episodes will develop those three situations, which make part of the series' bundle of stories. The three stories are intertwined in the pilot by

the parallel montage and, in the final minutes of the episode, by the song Juízo Final, by Nelson Cavaquinho and Élcio Soares, performed in the series by Arnaldo Antunes. The mix merges the sounds of the hospital equipment that keeps Lunga alive and the distorted sounds in Antunes' arrangement. In the scene in Caco Barcelos' apartment, the sound mixing also superimposes the doorbell ringing and the song. The lyrics speak of a period of darkness that will be overcome - "O sol há de brilhar mais uma vez/ A luz há de chegar aos corações/ Do mal será queimada a semente/ O amor será eterno novamente.".[1] That combination sets the clash between good and evil in the series. The police who kill represent evil. Representing good are the victims and the journalist and his team, who intend to shed light on the crimes, investigate them, and expose them.

Finally, without intending to exhaust the variations, I give the example of episode four of season four of Stranger Things, released in 2022 in two volumes, which Netflix encouraged viewers to "marathon." In that episode, titled "Dear Billy," Max (Sadie Sink) is by Billy's grave to read a letter in honor of her brother when Vecna, the creature that destroys humans in search of immortality, possesses her. To bring her back from the trance and the inverted world where her mind is trapped, her friends need to play a song that brings back good memories for Max – in this case, Running up That Hill, sung by Kate Bush. As the music plays, Max's body rises from the ground, and her bones are about to break. In the inverted world, Max starts to have good memories and tries to escape Vecna, running with all the energy she has left towards the light where her friends are. At the crucial moment, the screen goes black like a classic cliffhanger. The viewer believes they will have to go to the next episode, but the scene resumes after three seconds: Max comes out of the trance safely, and the episode ends.

Therefore, we experience a false cliffhanger. A cut comes precisely at the height of the episode's tension, but the editing leaves none of the

---

1   "The sun will shine once again/ The light will reach the hearts/ The seed of evil will burn/ Love will be eternal again."

action for the next chapter. The interruption is, thus, an ironic nod to the viewer. It celebrates the suspense mechanisms of serial fiction while subverting them. Here, then, the series' creators suggest they will operate according to the codes of the serial form that viewers are familiar with when, in fact, they dispense with the gap since there is nothing to wait for, as one can immediately access the next episode.

Final considerations

Audiovisual series incorporated a narrative device from literature, the cliffhanger, which became a strategic signature of these shows (NUSSBAUM, 2012). Although the device functions to create unforeseen narrative situations, viewers structurally expect it, which gives streaming series the possibility to ironically announce and suppress it, as in the example of Stranger Things. Audiences follow the episode knowing a narrative interruption will arrive, but the variations of how each series constructs this moment often become a narrative effect they appreciate. The device is a type of referent that allows the viewer to go from statement to enunciation or from the story to how one tells it.

The cutting technique, which establishes suspense and governs the desire of the spectator yearning to learn the outcome of the action, has been, since the 19th-century industrial-paced literature, turned into a marketing strategy that extends entertainment and its forms of emotion and pleasure. One of its characteristics is precisely its openly manipulative character, which reveals the method that takes the viewer to the next episode. The cliffhanger performs, in the seriality that still maintains the interval of waiting, an abrupt disengagement with the world of entertainment while at the same time prolonging it in the daily life of the audience, who awaits the continuation of the narrative.

The way in which the cliffhanger exposes narrative artifices and implicates the series' viewers by encouraging them to fill in gaps and imagine the story's continuity indicates its popular matrix. Streaming series have traces of the narrator even though that figure does not express itself through a voice (as in an oral or literary tale). The cliffhanger, an

interruption that creates suspense, indicates a form of conduct whose ability to involve the spectator can activate social reverberation. In a culture marked by conversation on socio-digital networks, gaps stimulate the viewer's imagination and interpretation and the interaction between viewers in digital communities who speculate about possible narrative outcomes and develop parallel stories.

The forms of distribution and release of contemporary series, which generate a compact audience, have altered or even revoked the waiting time that has characterized seriality, at least since the 19th-century serials. However, as discussed above, they do not abolish the cliffhanger. The popular narrative technique serves the complexity of contemporary series by providing, through interruptions and digressions, the transit between the central narrative axis and adjacent stories. Streaming shows renew the device in dialogue with the tradition of serial fiction. As we have seen, contemporary series explore other forms of prolongation and wait and demonstrate the virtues and pleasures of postponing the narrative even under the immediacy of life.

References

ARAÚJO, E. A espera e os estudos sociais do tempo e sociedade. In: ARAÚJO, E; DU-QUE, E (Orgs.). *Os tempos sociais e o mundo contemporâneo*. Braga: Centro de Estudos de Comunicação e Sociedade, 2012. p. 9-25.

BAZIN, A. Por um cinema impuro. In: BAZIN, A. *O que é o cinema?* São Paulo: Ubu, 2018. p. 122-147.

BUONANNO, M. Serialidade: continuidade e ruptura no ambiente midiático e cultural contemporâneo. *Revista Matrizes*, v. 13, n. 3, set.-dez. 2019. p. 37-58.

DE LA TORRE, T. *Historia de las series*. Barcelona: Roca Editorial, 2016.

ECO, U. A inovação do seriado. In: ECO, U. *Sobre os espelhos e outros ensaios.* Tradução Beatriz Borges. Rio de Janeiro: Nova Fronteira, 1989, p. 120-139. Universidade Federal de Juiz de Fora, 2020.

FIUZA, S.; RIBEIRO, A. P. G. *Autores* – histórias da teledramaturgia. São Paulo: Globo, 2008. v. 1.

GERRIG, R. "The Resiliency of Suspense". In: VORDERER, H; WUFF, H. J.; FRIE-DRICHSEN, M. (Orgs). *Suspense: Conceptualizations, Theoretical Analyses, and Empirical Explorations. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1996, p. 190-211.*

HIGGINS, S. *Matinee melodrama: playing with formula in the sound serial. New Jersey:
New Brunswick; London: Rutger University Press, 2016.*

ISER, W. *Prospecting: From reader response to literary anthropology. London: The John
Hopkins University Press, 1989.*

KOGUT, P. *As redes fervem com teorias sobre "The White Lotus". O Globo.* 09 dez. 2022.
Disponível em: https://oglobo.globo.com/kogut/critica/2022/12/as-redes-fervem-com-
-teorias-sobre-the-white-lotus.ghtml. Acesso em: 8 fev. 2024.

LEEUWEN, R. *The thousand and one nights: Space, travel and transformation.* New
York: Routledge, 2007.

LUHMANN, N. *A realidade dos meios de comunicação*. São Paulo: Paulus, 2005.

MARTÍN-BARBERO, J. *Dos meios às mediações*. 2. ed. Rio de Janeiro: Ed. UFRJ, 2003.

MENESES, A. B. Do poder da palavra. *Remate de Males.* Campinas, (7):
115-124, 1987.

MEYER, M. *Folhetim* – uma história. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1996.

MITTELL, J. *Complex TV. Nova York: Londres: New York University Press, 2015.*

NUSSBAUM, E. *Tune in next week. The New Yorker. July 22, 2012. Disponível em: ht-
tps://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2012/07/30/tune-in-next-week. Acesso em: jan. 2024.*

RYAN, M. L. *Transmedial Storytelling and Transfictionality. Poetics Today, v. 34, n. 3,
p. 361-388, 2013.*

SAINT-GELAIS, R. *Transfictionality. In: HERMAN, D.; MANFRED, J.; RYAN, M. L.
(Orgs.). The Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory. London: Routledge, 2005. p.
612-13.*

STYCER, M. *Euphoria mostra como o streaming freia maratona para surfar nas redes.
Folha de S. Paulo*, São Paulo, 23 fev. 2022. Disponível em: https://www1.folha.uol.com.
br/colunas/mauriciostycer/2022/02/euphoria-mostra-como-o-streaming-freia-maratonas-
-para-surfar-nas-redes.shtml. Acesso em: 8 fev. 2024.

SVARTMAN, R. *A telenovela e o futuro da televisão brasileira*. São Paulo: Cobogó, 2023.

TORRES, E. C. Folhetim, uma história sem fim: dos primeiros jornais de massa à inter-
net. *Lumina*, Juiz de Fora (MG), v. 6, n. 2, p. 1-26, 2012.

Audiovisual References

A MALDIÇÃO da mansão Bly. Criação: Mike Flanagan. Estados Unidos: Netflix. Série,
9 episódios, 2020.

ALIAS. Criação: J. J. Abrams. Estados Unidos: ABC. Série. 105 episódios, 2001-2006.

EUPHORIA. Criação: Sam Levinson. Estados Unidos: HBO. Série, 2ª temporada, 8
episódios, 2022.

O LIVRO de Boba Fett Criação: Jon Favreau. Estados Unidos: Disney+. Série, 7 epi-
sódios, 2021.

ROTA 66. Criação: Maria Camargo e Teodoro Poppovic. Brasil: Globoplay. Série, 8
episódios, 2022.

STRANGER THINGS. Criação: os irmãos Duffer. Estados Unidos: Netflix. Série, 4ª temporada, 9 episódios, 2022.

THE DROPOUT. Criação: Elizabeth Meriwether. Estados Unidos: Hulu. Série, 8 episódios, 2022.

THE LAST of us. Criação: Craig Mazin e Neil Druckmann. Estados Unidos: HBO, 9 episódios, 2023.

THE MANDALORIAN. Criação: Jon Favreau. Estados Unidos: Disney+. Série, 16 episódios, 2 temporadas, 2019-?

THE WHITE Lotus. Criação: Mike White. Estados Unidos: HBO. Série, 2ª temporada, 7 episódios, 2022.

VERDADES SECRETAS 2. Criação: Walcyr Carrasco. Brasil: Globoplay. Telenovela, 50 episódios, 2021.

About the author

Márcio Serelle is a CNPq Researcher and Professor of the Postgraduate Program in Social Communication and Literature at PUC Minas, where he coordinates the Media and Narrative research group. He earned his PhD in Literary Theory and History from the State University of Campinas (UNICAMP). He earned his master's in Portuguese Language Literature and an undergraduate degree in Social Communication with an emphasis in journalism from the Pontifical Catholic University of Minas Gerais (PUC Minas). He was a visiting professor at the Centre for Critical and Cultural Studies at the University of Queensland (Australia) with a senior postdoc fellowship (Capes). https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6124-5464