## Television Form: Past, Present, Future
"Caught in the *Dragnet*: Transforming a 1950s German TV Crime Series from Radio to Cinematic Narrative"
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*Dragnet* can be considered one of the first television "formats" which was adapted for German television in 1958, becoming paradigmatic for the crime drama genre in that country. It incorporated the signature music, the main points of the narrative structure, the characters, and the use of voiceover. However, the German version differed in various ways, rooted in the adaptive combination of the *Dragnet* radio drama aesthetic with a film aesthetic.

I cross-culturally compare and contrast, on the basis of multimodal analysis software, the mimetically-oriented German episode of *Stahlnetz* entitled "Die blaue Mütze" ("The Blue Cap", ARD 1958) with an equivalent diegetically-based *Dragnet* episode "The Big Seventeen" (NBC 1952).

Contrary to the weekly series *Dragnet*, which filmed in the same city – Los Angeles – episode after episode, the monthly German *Stahlnetz* initiated the German tradition of regional crime show productions continued to this day through the various *Tatort* (ARD) and *Soko* (ZDF) series. These are filmed with a different cast, in a different city, and with different production teams. Each version shared the basic – generic – narrative structure of the crime show: crime commission, crime scene investigation, questioning of victims, witnesses, and interrogation of suspects, and resolution.

However, with 29% of broadcast time within its 24 minute broadcast devoted to 17 voiceover segments, functioning as time compression devices, *Dragnet* affords proportionally more time to, and has quantitatively more voiceover segments than the 44 minute *Stahlnetz* episode with its 17% in 9 voiceover segments. There are a total of seven minutes and five seconds of voiceover segments in "The Big Seventeen" and seven and a half minutes of voiceover in "The Blue Cap."

Both share what I am calling the propagandistic function of the crime show, which presents an ideological defense of the dominant moral and legal system. In *Dragnet*, marijuana use was equated with using hard drugs like heroin and cocaine. All drugs were the cause of high crime and provoked violent and irrational behavior among vulnerable and gullible youths. The *Dragnet* episode continued the US campaign in the 1930s against drugs made notorious by the film *Reefer Madness* (1936) and was clearly designed to support the 1951 passage of the Boggs Act, which increased penalties for drug possession and dealing.

The *Stahlnetz* episode vilified US consumer culture (clothing styles, dance, music, leisure activities) in post WW2 Germany, which seduced youths to greed and ill-earned material goods, diverting their attention from "proper" jobs and well-earned money. The ideological message in *Stahlnetz* was that even "lesser" crimes such as beating up an old shopkeeper, needed to be prosecuted in order to achieve justice in society, no matter how trivial the crimes might seem. The Stahlnetz episode supported the conservative opposition toward

1950s US popular culture during the "economic miracle" period dominant in both the East and the West of Germany at the time.

Both episodes defined moral boundaries for youths facing consumer culture in the postwar 1950s, attempting to distinguish morally "good" (i.e., hard work and concurrent justified rewards) from "bad" consumption (i.e., drug usage and obtaining consumer goods from other than self-earned sources).

One scene portraying two similar "victims" illustrates the different ways of framing the narrative to accommodate both the propagandistic function of the series as well as the different traditions underlying the depictions. The *Dragnet* episode "The Big Seventeen" features a 39 second long voice-over narrative prior to the hospital scene with the drug dealer, Jocko Harris (Herb Vigran) who, after being beat up by the drug-dealing delinquent suspect, is lying "on his deathbed" in a hospital talking to the two detectives in a scene lasting one minute and five seconds. The voiceover contextualizes the hospital encounter by declaring how perfidious the drug dealers prey on naïve teenagers in order to make money off of their addiction, causing social mayhem. The function of the voiceover is to block any feelings of sympathy the audience might have for this "victim."

In the *Stahlnetz* episode "The Blue Cap," in the corresponding hospital scene questioning the victim, the chief detective is accompanied during the almost 3 minute interview with the mugging victim Emmanuel Fischer (Adalbert Kriwat) not by his sidekick as in *Dragnet*, but by the nurse as a representative of restoration, rejuvenation, and moral uprightness, generating feelings of sympathy with the victim and trust toward the detectives. Thus, the *Dragnet* voiceover essentially replaces the mimetic staging of the *Stahlnetz* scene to differently contextualize what is a remarkably similar image of an "injured victim," the high-angle close-up shot of a bandaged head.

Figure 1: Jocko Harris, Drug Supplier (*Dragnet*)     Figure 2: Emmanuel Fischer, Shopkeeper (*Stahlnetz*)