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As Time Passes Us By:
Temporal Dimensions in Formulas

Abstract: In this article, I shall deal with the concept of *formula*, created by John Cawelti as a means of studying popular culture, mostly literature. Based on a difference between conventions and inventions, this concept promised a lot of change in theoretical dealings with popular culture. However, some changes are needed in its definition, since Cawelti didn't spend a lot of time defining formula's mutation through time as well as its relation to genre, another concept used in popular culture studies. I also investigate in greater depth the aforementioned relation between convention and invention.

Key words: Cawelti, formula, popular culture, genre, time

Popular culture, or pop-culture as its shorter and better known term is appreciated, has had a rough time in the eyes of humanist scholar. Ever since such a display of one's group artistic genius came under the closer scrutiny of the art critic, it has been pushed aside, downcast and buried under a heap of arguments that have, for the most part, proved to be ephemeral. These arguments were many, but they all boiled down to the same basic premise: there was a line that was drawn between "high art" and "trash" (or "low art"), and that line was the boundary that no critic, or scholar of art or literature, dared or wanted to cross.[1] "High art" was deserving of study, it was the thing that made people happy, that gave them pleasure which advanced the reason and emotions of human race as a whole. The other "stuff" was something that was not deemed worthy to be either studied, or, indeed possibly even consumed.

However, during the early '60s of the XX century, this situation began to change. Given all the radical criticism that was fashionable then, and the beginning of post-modernism with its eloquent departures from meta-narratives, as they called them, it was no surprise. Also, a renewed and reinvigorated interest in Marxist theories and Left in general, and by transference to working class in general, managed to cast a new light on this form of cultural and

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[1] Of course, to those that enjoy the ever so interesting power-relation theories, it would be interesting to dig up who drew that line, where was it and why, the most important part, was it there.

artistic production. The popular culture was a tool of the common man, the working class. While the high-brow critics subscribed, maybe even unknowingly, to a division that looked it came straight out of Gramsci's theories on Hegemony, the new theorists have turned to the modus of production that was viewed as a means of cultural identification of the working class.

Of course, the arsenal of humanistic discipline available in that time, and tailored to "high art" interpretation, didn't fit all that well with researching popular culture. If we look at the traditional art subject of humanistic disciplines, we can see that it has always revolved around an individual and his accomplishments in some art form. In popular culture, we have the problem of the sheer size of volumes. Not only that, but in a sense, massiveness is a trait inherent to popular culture.[2] Therefore, new concepts were needed, and students of popular culture made a few that were predominant in the decade of 1960-s: the concept of cultural themes, medium, myth and formula.

The study of cultural themes is a well known method of dealing with any body of work. It is comprised of several steps. First you identify the themes that appear most often in the work under study, then group similar works according to availability of said themes in them. The concept of medium, or the study of media, had a revival with Marshall McLuhan, who insisted that instead of focusing so much on the message the medium transmits, we should study the medium itself (McLuhan 2003). Third, the concept of myth, was a very powerful idea in cultural studies of popular culture, and Cawelti himself admits that formula, as he conceived it, owes a lot to idea of myth. In short, the problem with working on such a term as myth, is that it is a classical overloaded term. It means a lot of different things to a lot of different people, therefore it can be become unwieldy to use in analysis.

So Cawelti focused his attention on the last term, the term and concept of formula. But before we explore a bit farther into the realm of his definition of the term, it would be good to reminiscence a bit about how popular culture general, and popular literature in particular came to be the global and considerable phenomenon that it is today.

A Gentle Stroll Down the Lane of Causality

The timeframe of success, if you wish to call it that, of popular culture, was a specific period of time in which technology finally became commonplace, and I do not mean the handgun. Printing presses up until the middle of

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[2] This is not to say that there are no means of looking into "high art" through the lens of a movement, let's say, or a group of authors or works that constitute a genre. I am talking about abstract notions of understood practice, not so much about a detailed view into it.

the 19th century have mostly been accustomed to newspapers, publishing houses and others that had the means to acquire them. From one point in history, that changed, and the printing press was more approachable even by common folk, whether by buying one, or by renting one, in general through various forms of making a publication.

This has brought about a democratization of publishing information, and thus certain magazines were born. Easy access to presses, to the means of productions, had an effect of proliferation of printed material. Linotype as one invention, and the process of making paper from wood pulp, have lowered the cost of producing printed work, and gave way to creation of "pulp" magazines (Russel 1982: 7).

These magazines were not expensive, and their publishers relied on massive circulations to make money. So did the authors. It was clear from the outset that those who wrote for these magazines needed to write as much as possible, and that their material needed to conform to the tastes of masses. In order to achieve this, the author needed a way to level the playing field, so to speak, and to find something to share with the audience. The easiest thing was the same culture they shared, through the use of *cultural conventions*.

For Cawelti, the idea of convention and its paired opposite, the invention, is crucial to defining formula and sketching boundaries around popular arts, genres and culture(s). To explain it succinctly as he did, conventions are elements that both the author and his audience, and all of us to be exact, know beforehand. Conventions are things like stereotypes, very well known plots, characters that are based on some cultural heritage and so forth. Inventions, as was already suggested, represent the polar opposite; they are new things, original elements that an author introduces to his work, such as new types of characters, original linguistic forms and so on (Cawelti 2004: 6-7).

Convention, according to Cawelti, is something that is supposed to give us, where "us" is defined as people in a shared cultural context, a common ground. It is something that we can use to get a grip, literally, on our positioning in the fabric of culture. Invention, on the other hand, introduces new elements into shared cultural context, and thus starts a process of constructing new understandings. Though opposite, both of the concepts are needed for an individual to function every day. If any becomes predominant, it shifts the balance of mutual understanding/identifying and handling new experiences; relying only on conventions or inventions produces completely negative results.

Of course, since there is no artistic production that is not rooted in culture, if this is the case with conventions and inventions, the use of these two elements in literature is almost the same. On one hand, conventions represent a known terrain of stereotypes, clichés, known characters and plots. On the other hand, invention is represented through the author's genius in exploring new possibilities and turns in narrative structure, thus bringing something new

to the field of literature. Though it is easy to recognize, at some level, which element any literary work uses the most, the best usually combine these two elements into a well-balanced fabric, that at once evokes the known, as well as confronts with the new (Cawelti 2004: 7). Convention and invention, therefore, create a continuum, in which any work can be placed.

Convention and invention as terms were crucial to Cawelti's definition of a formula. His first definition is that formula is "a conventional system for structuring cultural products" (Cawelti 2004: 8). Therefore, formula concerns itself with organizing and providing boundaries for those types of work that fall near the Convention pole in the great continuum described above.

It is to be expected that, since it relies so much on conventions, formula is also a deeply cultural construct. Simply put, conventions are determined by their overreaching cultural context. What is considered a "known fact", or a "given truth" or a "recognized archetype" in one culture, does not, indeed it cannot, translate well into another. Therefore, in order to be successful, formula must reflect the understandings, symbols and myths of the culture in which it is made.[3] This also implicates two more properties. First, that the repertoire of elements in a work of popular culture will be somewhat limited.

After all, being culturally bonded means that it needs to react to the conventions of that culture. In USA, for example, we have fixed notions on what "western" means; if a story does not involve horses, cowboys, frontier and some kind of pursuit, you will hear comments that it is simply not western.

The second point that Cawelti put forth is a question. Why do formulas enjoy such popularity? The proposed answer by Cawelti is rather simple. Because these formulas, and formulas in general, represent a synthesis of several common cultural functions which in the past were under the "jurisdiction" of other cultural institutions, such as myths or rituals. In a modern society, which is ever so multi-cultural, this has proved to be possible only inside one ethnical group, never on a scale of the entire society. Therefore, Cawelti proposes that popular culture, with its formulas, provides this common ground for integration into global society (Cawelti 2004: 10). On top of this, formulas have one more specific dimension, a dimension of game, which then embodies in it two aspects. First is the aspect of experience of recreation, the pattern of excitement, suspense and release. Second aspect is more psychological; it is a part of an ego enhancement, which happens through temporary resolution of frustrations and tensions by means of fantasy.

This form of escapism, in lack of a better term, figures prominently in Cawelti's theoretical system. His main thesis is that formula accomplishes one big function/goal, that is to provide means for its parent culture to overcome certain ten-

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[3] In order to illustrate this, Cawelti gives us an example of plumbers, who can never be heroes, since who ever saw or heard about a plumber that saved the world?

sion through building a self-contained world in which there is no disorder, the uncertainty or any limitation of our the real world, world of experience.

The next logical question is how does one "poor" formula achieve all this? First, it is not concerned with the *quality* of given satisfaction, only that it is immediate, exiting and enticing. Although I will not repeat Cawelti's example involving pornography (Cawelti 1977: 14), there is something to be said about the idea of having readily-available stimuli that can provide instant gratification. However, in order for this "escape" to be successful, it needs also to be able to sustain itself over a longer period of time, and to provide a form of closure and completion inside itself. (Cawelti 1977: 15).

The main dichotomy in any culture that provides a climate for the formula to achieve the aforementioned is between the need for change and the need for stability. On one hand, we all crave something new and interesting, lest our lives be drowned in boredom and endless repeating cycles of the same. This can be achieved, of course, but the break of the *modus vivendi*, that is based on certain cultural assumptions, is not that easy to achieve. So we crave quick return to our known surroundings, the places we find safe.

The formula then constructs a world that pieces together and resolves the tension between these two moments. Firstly it creates and represents a world in which there is something new and different, where suspense and intense unknown await us. Secondly, it then provides a frame that is based on conventions, and that assures us that everything will be resolved to a satisfying, or, more importantly, known matter. The formulaic worlds, then, promise us a certain controlled tension, that we know can be resolved in due time via mechanisms that our own cultural context provides.

One more thing that is needed then is the point of identification inside the formulaic world. That is usually the main protagonist. In this sense, formulaic literature is different from other sorts of art because it doesn't require the consumer to confront reality in all of its gory and bleak sense, but to feel identified with a sort of a self-idealized image; heroes in formulaic worlds can do things that the consumer ordinarily cannot. [4]

Unfortunately, Cawelti's ideas and concepts were not used in analysis of popular culture in the local academic discourse, so any additions or improvements on this theoretical apparatus were not forthcoming. Popular culture was analyzed and looked upon through other, more "conventional" means in either anthropological context, or similar disciplines, like sociology or even some form of cultural studies analysis. This, in my opinion, is a shame, since, as I

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[4] Of course, this is just a short treatment of main essential ingredients of Cawelti's treatise on the subject. More can be found within his work. Look in (Cawelti 1977; Cawelti 2004).

have hopefully shown, his theoretical apparatus has a lot of benefits in research.[5]

I have shown several important aspects that paint popular culture not only as a viable art form unto itself, but as a very specific and potent social phenomenon that requires serious thoughts and analysis, from many disciplines, not just literary criticism or media studies. Though Cawelti's idea of formula is well – established, and has significant potential in anthropological studies of popular culture (to which I shall come shortly), there are some problems with his theories that I would like to point out in this paper.

Anthropology and Cawelti's Formula

There are few concept in anthropology that were as contested and so fiercely debated as the concept of "culture". It had a lot of definitions, starting from the famous Tylor's definition, of a culture as a "complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society." (Tylor 1958 [1871]: 1) that is taken as a landmark of the entire evolutionist theoretical school, over Kroeber's and Kuckhohn's 162 definitions (Kroeber and Kluckhohn 1952), to radical departures and criticisms of "postmodernists". However, for better or worse, "culture" is something that anthropologists study, something that is considered their subject.

If we look at the issue from this angle it becomes clear why anthropologists should take note of Cawelti's work. Cultural conventions as he called it, or set of practices and beliefs as they can be renamed here, are what gives formula significance in anthropological context.

Cawelti's ideas and theoretical apparatus give us a potent means of exploration in two specific ways. If we are concerned with popular culture as a phenomenon, we can turn to known anthropological means of inquiry into the context of creation of certain popular culture item to better answer the "how" and "why" questions that can be asked in connection to a specific piece of popular culture, be it a noir movie or a detective story.

But Cawelti's ideas become more potent, if I dare say, for anthropologists, as a means to mobilize popular culture itself as a new window into the functioning of specific cultural contexts. Since formula and conventions it is built upon, allow us to be privy of the values, practices and beliefs of the populace of its consumers, we can use it to explore what those values and beliefs are. It

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[5] Only exception to this situation is on the master studies of Department of Ethnology and Anthropology at Faculty of Philosophie, Belgrade University, syllabus for Anthropology of Popular Culture, taught by ass. prof. Dragana Antonijević, PhD.

is similar to the role Williamson ascribes to folklorists in modern age; if folk-lorists can analyze modern myths and legends to acquire knowledge of the values of groups, it is not that farfetched to utilize popular culture in similar fashion (Williamson 1987: 257). After all, people who consume popular culture are by definition "common people", so what they are partial to, in terms of exactly the forms of escapism and enjoyment that Cawelti mentions, represents a "common denominator" in any certain culture. Indeed, one could argue that popular culture, since it's so massive in its reach, reflect the traits of its context in a very wide scope, and that it can, therefore, give us insight into other mechanics of said cultural context.

This paper, then, can also be thought of as an introduction to the theoretical apparatus that can provide a lot of value for everyday anthropological work, and a simple example of how to extract a formula from a piece of popular culture corpus of material.

Genre and the Formula

Another aspect of formula that I would like to take a look at is the relationship between formula and genre. Cawelti has already covered some ground in his work on this problematic. In his view, the idea behind a firm separation between genre and formula as concepts is that genre is a somewhat universal form that spans cultures, while formula is firmly bound in culture. For example, myth has universal form among cultures, while western, or some other type of formulaic literature, does not (Cawelti 1977: 7).

This view of the genre is severely lacking, simply because it denies several characteristics of genre that are present in newer and more complete theories of this concept. For example, ideas of Mikhail Bakhtin, who defined it as a focal point through which we fixate on our reality, were read only in the '80s of the last century in Western Europe and USA. That focal point can only be achieved if the genre is envisioned not as a static, rigid concept used merely for classification, but rather as a fluid entity, whose borders are porous, and form changeable. In this sense, genre then needs to be in some relation to its environment, to social and cultural context it exists and was created in; this relation is always dialectical, a constant dialogue with the reality that it is a part of (Bakhtin 1980; Dorst 1983: 414 - 416)[6]

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[6] Bakhtin's theories of genre, polyglossy, chronotope and heteroglossia are not only limited to genre analysis an research in terms of folklore or "high culture". Their usefulness to general public culture research is not to be understated. For more references, consult (Bakhtin 1980; Bakhtin 1981; Bakhtin 1984).

Defined as previously stated, similarity between genre and formula becomes uncanny. Both are, in actuality, analytical concepts that are engendered inside socio-cultural context that defines them. They carry its traits and reflect its properties. But since genre is better known of the two, better defined and used a lot more in literature, wouldn't it be better to simply use it instead of inventing a whole new concept just for popular culture?

No, we need both. Genre is always in a dialect with its environment, with reality into which it is brought. Formula, on the other hand is merely a reflection of cultural conventions. To put it metaphorically, genre is a lens, formula is a mirror. Therefore, it is much more suited for classifying and then analyzing popular culture, because it is a massive body of work that is not wholly concerned with changing its context, merely reflecting it. Genre, at least if we subscribe to Bakhtin's ideas, is something that is changed and changes with the context. Therefore, it's much more complicated to work with.

Formula is also a "lesser term" then genre. When I say "lesser", I do not mean "less valuable" of course, just that genre contains formulas, while the other way around is not possible. Cawelti contemplated about formulas as primordial forms of genres. This may sound a bit preposterous, but I can say that under closer scrutiny, this idea sounds much more plausible if put under a different light. Formulas can be defined as a reflection part of genre; if genre is in a dialogue with its context, it also needs the part that can reflect back context's traits. This can be the formula, which is why it is much easier to use it as main analytical tool for popular culture, culture which is produced by any given culture for that culture.

Experiment

The idea behind this experiment is quite simple. First, I will try to discern what the elements of SF formula are in general, and what conventions it follows. After that, I will take three TV shows that are labeled "Science Fiction" and point out the differences that they posses in relation to the main formula we defined. These differences are not a staple of the entire genre, or of the entire formula, but divergences that can help us view the influence of time in the formula and the relation between convention and invention.

But in order to do this, I first must briefly visit the structure of SF formula. So, let's begin.

Formula of SF

Before I tackle the formula, I need to look very briefly upon the definition of science fiction as a genre. However, this task is not as easy as it sounds. Ac-

cording to some critics, science fiction is either what we, as consumers, point to or what publishers say it is in accordance to their new publishing project (Roberts 2000: 2). Of course, these kind of circular definitions are of no big help, so poring through various dictionaries, we encounter one thing that is common among them all, and that is specifying a difference between the worlds science fiction literature describes and the world around us, the real world (Roberts 2000: 3). One questions that remains is how is this world different, and according to Roberts, this "point of difference" is what separates science fiction for other forms of literature. Darko Suvin coins a new term for this point of difference, *novum*, and what this novum needs to be is fixed in a materialized discourse. If, for example, we contrast Kafka's story from "Metamorphosis" with a similar science fiction story, the main difference will be that the SF story will try to devise a potentially rational and plausible explanation for the change to take place. So this novum is "grounded in the discourse of possibility, which is usually science or technology" (Roberts 2000: 7).[7]

I have decided to go with SF TV shows in this paper rather than SF lliterature for several reasons. SF literature, as a genre, is vast and such work would require a lot more space than this paper provides. SF TV show also have a more massive audience, so it is plausible that they would, in their own compressed form (when compared to literature), much more clearly reflect conventions of their respective cultural context.[8] Most SF TV shows take Space, the vast expense of the known or unknown Universe, as their main setting. In that setting, we have a sub-setting, usually aboard a vessel that can either exist in space statically, or, better yet, move through space. This paradigm has been established both by literature and by earliest TV shows like "Dr. Who" or "Star Trek". In both of these shows, the Space was idealized as a form of the "final frontier", where brave men go to explore and better themselves as well as the world they are a part of. This is the first element of the SF formula, by sheer volume of its representation in SF TV shows. Whether the show is mostly "static" or "dynamic", Space figures prominently in the background.[9]

It would be, however, impractical to set our main character(s) in the eternal void of Space, not to mention that our audience would probably not find it very amusing or know. In order to bind the narrative to known loci, most SF

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[7] This is a very short treatise on the subject of defining SF. For more information, consult (Roberts 2000) and (Russell 1982).

[8] Of course, no need to add that this also means formula definitions and changes I show here are not perhaps present in the entire genre, or in different modes of production, so they are not to be treated as such.

[9] "Static" and "dynamic" are here used to indicate whether the main narrative is tied to a certain place in Space (such as a planet or a space station) that is mostly static, or for any other place in Space that is dynamic (a ship).

TV shows introduce some form of fixed environment. In most cases it is either a space ship or a space station; to be more general it is any vessel that has the ability to exist in Space. This is the second element of the SF formula, existence of space-faring vessel, in whatever shape or size it may be represented. For example, in "Star Trek" it is usually the famous ship Enterprise, though in "Star Trek: Deep Space 9" it was a space station.[10] In "Farscape" it is a living ship called Moya.

Though there are examples of having an artificial intelligence pilot the ship, or even have a living vessel, like the aforementioned Moya, most SF TV shows include some form of a crew. This crew gives us our main characters, makes plots more interesting, and in general provides for a point of contact and immersion into the show. It also serves a very important purpose in the narrative, and that is to define a context for the Hero, main figure of the show. It doesn't matter how many people the crew has, the show's central figure is almost always the Captain, Commander or similar character. It would be hard to argue, just to give one example that "Star Trek" has been mostly about the various captains who had the (dubious) honor of sitting in the famous command chair of USS Enterprise; indeed, this is how most fans differentiate between the myriad of shows. It's the same if you say "Star Trek: The Next Generation" or "Jean-Luc Picard's time" or something similar.

In essence, most of the Hero figures are captains of the main ships in series. They can have various personas, but two of the most prominent ones are either as a full-fledged captain, in which case we can presume the ship and the crew are some form of military, or as an explorer, like in the classical "Dr. Who" series. Like all Hero character, they are brave individuals, driven by duty and honor, to perform their tasks and assignments to their fullest extent. They can be rough, but are also just and fair. If there is a crew, no matter how big, captain enjoys their full loyalty, and leads them in a firm but just way. Matters of doubt, or of any similar discrepancy in the attitudes of the crew, are quickly resolved; they exist only insofar as to show, yet again, the strength with which the crew believes and follows the captain.

These three elements constitute the bulk of what is formula of SF TV shows. Of course, these three elements can be mixed in a variety of ways, but mostly, given the most popular TV shows, they are mixed exactly as shown above. The producers/directors/scriptwriters set a story in Space, bind it to a spatial locus such as a vessel and then add a Hero, with or without the crew.[11]

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[10] For completeness sake, I have to add that a ship named "Defiant" was added into the show in later seasons.

[11] Indeed, even famous parodies, such as Douglas Adams' "Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy", follow this formula to a certain extent, though with a parody twist that underlines its freshness and originality.

The Escapism of Science Fiction

After having defined the formula of SF TV shows, I need to follow on to another Cawelti's concept, escapism. Why were SF TV shows popular, and what was the component that was the most "escapist" in them?

In order to achieve escapism, the formula of popular culture in question must provide a world different than that of the audience, yet somehow similar. I already covered the use of cultural conventions as a means of doing this. Science fiction, however, both as a literary genre as well as TV/movie genre, has always been focused on world creation through its narrative; though there are other genres of literature, not to mention popular culture, that employ the "technique" of world-building as their chief stratagem, science fiction has made it its landmark. Indeed, the more alien the world, the better.

This narrative technique was used to create the main point of separation between the narrative world and the real world of the audience. On the other hand, the Hero figure was the main point of fusion between these two worlds, since he embodied the values that were prevalent in contemporary American culture. Heroes could be either all-out American boys, like Flash Gordon or Kim Kinnison[12], or even characters of other races/species but that behaved and had a system of values similar to an idealized model of beginning 20th century America.[13]

This legacy in SF "pulp" literature is what SF TV shows that were made in 1960s and 1970s could use for their inspiration. The point of separation and fusion still remained the same, Space and Heroes respectively. But there was one more point that was present in the literature, but has been given a new life; in order to explain what it is, I will need to take a look into a specific cultural trait of contemporary USA.

These decades saw two important developments. First was the strength and promises of NASA's Space Program. After great successes with Apollo crafts, and moving into space shuttle research, there were different pundits that proclaimed the future is bright (Williamson 1987: 265). The other was development and availability of technology, which moved slowly but steadily into everyday people's homes. The people who were crucial for exploring Space, NASA's engineers, and who were responsible for America's space technology, have encoded the narrative of space exploration with a specific formula, that of "new frontier" myth. Their belief in technology and scientific progress' power to help improve human life was unshakeable and held fast (Williamson 1987: 258).

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[12] The main protagonist of wildly successful and known *Lensman* series by E.E. Smith, which appeared in "Amazing Stories" from 1934 onwards.

[13] Though most of the characters were simply American boys thrust into a special situation by either forces unknown or their own curiosity.

It is not surprising then, that most of these beliefs were translated, almost intact, into SF TV shows and became main fabric of the storyline. Directors looked into SF literature from the "Golden Age"[14], while SF writers sought inspiration from scientists, the same ones that were reflecting popular conventions. Most of the situations can be resolved with knowledge of science or some application of a technological device or another. Similar to the utopian ideas that were mainstream in these decades when it comes to scientific development (Williamson 1987: 260), SF TV show made use of technology to build incredible devices, such as a "replicator" in "Star trek", a device that can conjure food almost out of thin air, and has thus ended world hunger.

There are other, not so humane examples, of course, but the fact remains that advanced technology plays an important part in building the experience of escapism in SF shows. It plays a role in both separation and fusion. Advanced technology, to paraphrase Artur C. Clarke, will sometimes look like magic[15], therefore a world not our own. Fusion, on the other hand, because the cultural context has provided a shared understanding in which any problem can be solved through science.

The Shows: Battlestar Galactica

"Battlestar Galactica", or "TOS" ("The Original Series") as the show is called, started airing around 1978. It told a story of 12 Colonies of Man, who are in a war with Cylons, intelligent machines left around the Universe by another race. This war has waged on for thousand years, and Cylons were relentless. Finding an ally in Count Baltar, they perform a surprise attack that destroyed the Colonies and their armada, all but one ship, the Battlestar named "Galactica". Its Commander, Adama, takes reigns and assembles a ragtag fleet that begins search for Earth, the last possible

The series was quite popular in its time, received stellar ratings and developed a cult following among the SF fans, though it existed only for one season, from 1978 to 1979. On the surface, when you look at some of the episodes, you can see the formula stated above in all its glory. We are treated to several characters. First is Commander Adama, a leader of . The Hero part is played both by him and his son Lee, callsign "Apollo" who is a daring pilot on one of Galactica's "Vipers"; they are star fighters, for lack of a better term. Main villains are of course Cylons but also Count Baltar, the traitor.

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[14] A period in the history of science fiction literature that is considered most prolific, and from which a lot of works that are considered masterpieces today have emerged. For a more detailed look into this period and its significance, consult (Russell 1982: 7-10).

[15] The entire quite can be accessed at http://www.quotationspage.com/quote/776.html.

The backdrop of Space serves its purpose nicely to alienate the consumers of this world. During their perilous journey to Earth, while being chased by Cylons, they run into various planets with various alien life forms, like, for example, a party planet on which there are beings that, well, party all the time. This ephemeral approach to narrative was extended also to characters. Most of the characters were one-dimensional, with each of the main characters taking up one facet of known stereotypical behavior. Adama is the wise leader who can always find a way out of a difficult situation. Apollo is the "boy scout", a pilot who does everything by the book, while Starbuck is the maverick; Boomer plays the middle ground. This kind of approach was not strange for the time, since most of the shows relied on Space and technology utilized to achieve success, while characters were not the main point of focus.

TOS, as is shown, fitted perfectly into a well-established SF TV show formula. It did this by reusing not only the conventions of the culture it was contextualized in, but also conventions of the genre. This took another meaning altogether when George Lucas, the famed director of "Star Wars", threatened to sue "Battlestar Galactica" studios for damages, since the show looked so much like "Star Wars".

The Re-Imaging of Battlestar

A couple of decades later, Ron Moore had an idea. It was a simple idea, and that was to take the old "Battlestar Galactica", or, rather, its main premise, and to recast it into a new show that would be more suited for the "modern times". What he created was first shown as a mini-series on Sci-Fi channel in 2003. After achieving great success, Sci-Fi Channel ordered one more season and that is how it started. Currently the show is in its fourth and final season, but with another mini-series planned.[16]

When Ron Moore said its re-imagined, he means so. Though the basic premise is the same as the original series, which means the plot is also basically the same (rag-tag fleet seeking Earth), everything else, from the main setting up to the characters, suffered a tremendous change.
For one, some of the characters were re-casted in different gender, so Boomer and Starbuck became female, which adds a different twist to the show altogether. Baltar is not a Count, but a doctor, one of the prime scientists that was working on a huge defense mainframe before the Cylons attacked. Secondly, Cylons are not limited to robotic shapes as they were in the original series; in TNSTNS ("The New Series", as I will call the re-imagined series), Moore

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[16] It could be interesting to point out that Ron Moore was also behind one of the grittiest and darkest Star Trek serial, "Star Trek: Deep Space 9".

introduced human-like models that are made in series from 1 to 12, though we only get to know the first 7 varieties.

The setting was changed the most. In TNS, there are no "party planets" and weird haircuts; we are treated to a dark and gritty setting, in which humanity's fate seems bleak. Understory has much deeper religious connotations, as we realize through the show that the 12 Colonies are polytheist and believe in a pantheon of gods that are direct related to ancient Greek pantheon; Cylons that are chasing them are monotheists, and have built a philosophy around a single God. On top of that, we are constantly reminded, during the opening credits, how many people are still left in the fleet. Needless to say, the number constantly keeps dwindling down.

One more thing about the setting is its visual and technological dimension. Though there are space-faring ships, huge Battlestars as well as Basestars[17], intelligent Cylon raiders, there are no lasers or magical devices that can cure all illness. Vipers fire bullets, as well as raiders, marines stationed aboard Galactica look like modern SWAT teams. TNSThe characters in TNS are not flat like they are in the original series, or, for that matter, as in any known SF franchise. Most of the characters fall squarely into a moral gray-area. In the first episode, we are immersed into a moral choice of Apollo as he destroys a civilian vessel that is suspected (but never confirmed) to have nuclear weapons on board. The rest of the characters all have similar choices at some point in the series.

It is not, therefore, a large stretch of imagination to think about TNS as something radically different than your usual SF TV shows offerings. The point of separation, or anxiety as Cawelti puts it, is still there in Otherness, especially cunningly reinvigorated by the "like us but not us" moments of human-looking Cylons. However, the point of fusion is a little vague. Though TNS is teeming with Heroes, there isn't one that sports all the characteristics we need in order for him to be called a Hero in the first place. Not only then, but the imaginary world of TNS is frightfully close to our own, so much so, in fact, that at times the ships, the space fighters, all seem like a narrator's gimmick to outline intense psychological drama that is happening inside the Fleet and Galactica itself.

This case provides us with two conflicting items. First, it shows the strength of the formula and, more importantly, reception of a formula and the longevity of all its elements. However, on the other side, TNS case begs another question altogether: how many elements are needed in formula for it to be called distinct? And what of escapism and enjoyment then?

Before I try to give answers to these questions, I would like to introduce another modern SF show that will show a problem in innovation/convention dichotomy.

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[17] Cylon ship that is equivalent of a Battlestar.

"Firefly", or Sergio Leone Meets "Star Trek"

"Firefly" was an awkward show, ever since its conception in the head of Joss Whedon of "Buffy the Vampire Slayer" fame. Also the director, Whedon had increasing problems not just with his own reputation among broader crowds, but also with the network he signed up with[18]. This has led to poor management of the series, and its eventual cancellation even before the first season completed.

However, the show immediately commanded the attention of SF lovers who were able to catch its chaotic screening time. Those who didn't learned of it, and got DVD sets and they were hooked.

This show is about a kind of a ship, named "Serenity" after a big battle of a recent civil war. The ship's class is "Firefly", hence the name. We are following a strange band of miscreants guided by their captain, Malcolm "Mal" Reynolds. He holds command over several people: his first officer Zoe, pilot Wash, mechanic Kaylee, strongman Jane, Inara. In the pilot of the series, we are introduced to three other "new" members: Shepherd Book, Simon and his sister River, who are the main plotlines. Simon and his sister are running from the law because of experiments that were done to River and which effects are not completely known[19]. In the pilot, after a lot of conundrum, Mal takes both of them in and so the show starts.

The Universe in "Firefly" is not an alien space in a typical SF sense. There are no aliens, only humans with their colonies and an overarching and oppressive government called The Alliance. "Serenity" also is not a Battlestara military ship, heavily armed and taken care of, "Serenity" is a mere cargo ship; lots of space, no weapons.

On top of this, both captain and his first officer are veterans of a former civil war that raged between the Alliance and a group of planets that wanted Independence. Of course, the Independents lost, and while both Mal and Zoe carry scars, emotional as well as physical, there is no hall of fame for them. Though the characters are more easily distinguished in dimension of Good or Bad then in TNS, they are no do-gooders. Captain and his first officer both have a sense of duty that compels them to act in a certain way. Jane, one of the crew members, on the other hand has none, and is mostly concentrated on his own personal gain.

Why Sergio Leone reference in the title then?

There are some elements in "Firefly" that call to mind western movies, especially those of "spaghetti western" category. In the opening scenes of the

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[18] That was "Fox".

[19] The only effects we are shows during show's episodes is that she has violent moods swings and has uncanny ability to read people in any situation.

pilot, we can glimpse at the end of the brutal civil war two of the characters were involved in. The characters they meet are lowlifes and scoundrels, and the "New Frontier" moment of colonization is not the promise of better future, but a reality of constant struggle.

TNSThe second formula is that of a SF show. We have Space, we have the ship, and we have episodes, such as "Ariel"; the episodes aesthetics are that of a SF show, with polished environments and strange technology the crew is chasing. On the other side, "Train job" is about a good, old heist of valuable cargo from a train, and this episode certainly reads as a rather good western movie.

This show proves to be a little easier on our subject than TNS, because it simply mixes several conventions that build several known formulas. Yet, it gives us space to ask a new question of Cawelti's theories, and that is how conventions, found in a single place, build up something that resembles invention?

The Time Differential

I will permit myself to jump right to the point. Cawelti's notion of formula is concerned mostly with its fixedness in time and space, its immutability or the ability not to change rapidly and to contain the changes within a fixed locus inside formula's own coordinate system of convention. Given the examples above, I am convinced that we need to define a time component to go along with other elements of formulaic literature, and to track changes happening to elements of any specific formula we define.

There are several reasons why I would want to do something like this.

First reason is technological breakthroughs that happened in last few decades that led directly to increased democratization of publishing. Personal computers and word processors, one of the first applications that appeared on them, gave the means to produce; Internet and its popularity and ever-increasing penetration into our culture and society, gave the means to distribute. These days, creating something that could be considered popular culture is easier than ever, and therefore, it develops and changes much more rapidly that it did back when Cawelti envisioned the formula as a concept.

Secondly, there is a need to include the idea of different temporal contexts in which formula exist. The changes in conventions, that reflect changes in socio-cultural context, also bring with them modifications of escapism, or, to be more precise, what is needed for successful "escape" into another world.

There will be two sides from which I will approach this problem. First is from TNS examples, second will be to show how the dichotomy between invention and convention works.

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ability not to change rapidly and to contain changes within a fixed locus inside a formula's own coordinate system of convention. Given the examples above, I am convinced that we need to define a time component to go along with other elements of formulaic literature, and to track changes happening to elements of any specific formula we define.

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The second reason is that there is a need to modify the method that is used when working with concepts like formula, to include at least an idea that time passes, things change and that we need to account for those changes inside our work. There is also a need to account for different forms of escapism that can also change, because they are contextualized like most things that concern formula.

There will be two sides from which I will approach this problem. The first is from BSG examples, whilst the second will be to show how the dichotomy between invention and convention works.

Example One, Battlestars

In TNS, Utopia-like Space is re-envisioned as a bleak and dangerous place, desolate and lacking in planets that can support carbon-based life forms, not to mention alien life itself. Instead of mysterious alien races that built humanity's greatest Nemesis, in TNS Cylons are a work of man, technology that rebelled and took upon itself to tear down its makers. Though dystopia is common in SF literature, in SF TV shows it was a rarely used concept; given that it is currently utilized in one of the most popular SF TV shows in past five years, it is not unwise to step back and view this particular turn in narrative with a fresh eye towards its influence on Cawelti's concepts.

The changes in formula's elements are clear, and I have already mapped them. Next questions then are not posed to further this particular line of inquiry; I would like to dedicate rest of this article to adding a few new concepts to Cawelti's theoretical apparatus.

First question is how time influences the formula? This question can seem almost irrelevant, given the fact that Cawelti has already mentioned that some innovative-like properties attached to known conventions of the formula are

not only possible, but encouraged; indeed, it is this technique that brings to us true masterpieces of formulaic literature. However, there still needs to be a common shared context. Cawelti gives the example of a new breed of western movies that carry within them different narratives about Native Americans. In these movies, the role of Native Americans has been radically changed; they are not "Injuns" anymore, someone to scream at the top of their lungs and get shot at (mostly by USA cavalry), but people with heritage and distinct culture. Of course, main point of separation in western movies, West, has remained largely the same, untamed wilderness and a new frontier. In the end, then, change is welcome and needed, but overall symbolism must remain the same in order for formula to function.

As strange as it sounds, however, the question is better asked another way around. Given that we are anthropologists, we can glean a better understating if we approach this problem not from a pure literary standpoint, but by asking how does escapism change in accordance with cultural context's shifts?

Looking at original "Battlestar Galactica", point of separation is achieved through a well-known set of guidelines that were received from literature as well as established conventions in popular culture of the time. The main point of separation is Otherness, vast Space that is treated like a new Frontier, while the main point of fusion is characters and situations that embody cultural conventions of the time, and it is these actions that deal away with the suspense of separation. TNS stands in stark contrast. Space is merely a backdrop and the Otherness is not achieved via simply placing the narrative in it; on the contrary, the Otherness in this sense is achieved by inverting the narrative lens and turning it towards main characters and their actions. Also, I could freely argue that the main allure of this show is precisely in its refusal to deal with suspension at the end of each episode, instead following a massive story arc that spans the entirety of the show.

Developments like this are a small wonder, since the world in general, and western culture in specific, have significantly changed their relationship to the Other, at least superficially. Plain, "colonialist" view has given way to a more reflective view. [20] Scientific development and space faring "legends", have also toned down, especially since there were several accidents that reminded the general public on how hard it is to travel to Space (Williamson 1987: 265). This has also influenced a view of Space as a "New Frontier", and Space is nowadays regarded with a more sober and careful tones.

Scientific and technological development are also looked upon differently. There is a well-known catchphrase that we are already living in science fic-

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[20] This statement is a very trivial way to look at an incredibly complex subject matter; I am acutely aware of this, however, there is no space to delve deeper into intricacies of politics.

tion, since the technology we are accustomed to today was a remote dream a few decades ago. Therefore, science and technology cannot be used so trivially to provide separation. Putting a computer terminal on the show like in "Star Trek", or simply showing a ship in space is notenough anymore to give us a sense of wonder and excitement.

What is then?

Reflexive "inner eye" turned towards ourselves, means that we also need more detailed characters in our popular culture, since one-dimensional characters do not fit the bill anymore. Simply put, popular culture needs to reflect the cultural context it is a part of.

The point of escapism still hasn't changed, and indeed it shouldn't have. Human needs do not easily change in spirit but they do change in form. If the first escapism had a strong utopian component that was used, among other things, to achieve the Other World separation, the second form of the escapism is mostly dystopia. Taking into account the self-reflection, escapism is now a projection of audiences into dystopian setting that looks a lot like our world. Conflicts from this world are projected onto that imaginary surface, dissected there. The main positions in which this form of escapism and the other differ, is that there is not clear "winner" in any conflict. If we look at TNS, we fathom that one side could annihilate the other, but there would be no clear gains.[21] Therefore, we cannot talk about accustomed points of fusion.

But, in essence, escapism needs another point of separation, simply because the context changed. If this is the way it goes, then it's normal that formula has to change as well, to accommodate for a growing need for certain kind of stimuli. This "turned about" view of things, watching first the escapism and then the formula that has risen to give formulaic, pre-determined answers to needs of humans to live through fabricated conflicts that mirror real-world ones, is much more powerful and gives us the means how to isolate the temporal component I am trying to show here. I will go into greater detail on how this can be achieved in practice in a later chapter.

Inventions Built of Conventions

I would like to tackle the last point I raised when describing the material, and that is changing of convention through time that give shape to formulaic literature.

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[21] Cylons have an agenda to fill, but we are not privy, as of current roster of episodes, to what it is. Humans are not able to defeat the Cylons, but even if they somehow managed, they would achieve little, since the Colonies were almost completely destroyed and are heavily irradiated from Cylons nuclear weapons.

Again, Cawelti tried to subsume this line of inquiry under his more general theory of "refreshment". Certain small-scale inventions need to be attached to a more general conventional structure, in order to produce something that is both new but recognized. Although, again, this is a completely valid point, it misses one important dimension of convention creation, and that is *time*.

If time influences both escapism and formula, or, to be more exact, socio-cultural context and thus all of its reflections, it is expected for it to influence conventions as well. After all, conventions are culturally made, and therefore must follow whatever trend, literally, is currently the norm in any given socio-cultural system. But what is also interesting to note, is that sometimes, different conventions, different formulas are being utilized to build a specific work of art. Where do we then place the boundary between convention and invention? And as the last consequence of this diachronic lens, how do conventions react when transported through time?

The producer of "Firefly" took two very rich formulas and combined them into a show. We have elements of a good western, all with gun-slinging desperados, pistol duels as well as horses (at one point). On the other side, it's a full-blooded SF show, with Space, space-faring vessel, advanced science that is used to terra-form planets and other items that constitute quite a good SF TV show. "Firefly" is then different from TNS in this regard; where TNS changes several elements, "Firefly" simply combines more. These introductions of "complete" items from another formula can hardly be considered as "refreshment".

When an author "refreshes" the formula he is using, it is usually done in one or little more elements, while the entire formula remains the same. In these combinations, we have several formulas that are intertwined and produce a whole that is more than the sum of its parts. Therefore, we need to contextualize the whole. In present time, "Firefly" can be considered innovative because such mixes are not readily made among producers or screenwriters. It is normal that authors would seek to differentiate themselves in this field by mixing and matching different formulas and trying to make a sum of them. Therefore, if we identify any single set of elements that can construe a formula, there is a possibility that there are other elements in the body of work under analysis that belong under some other formula, defined in a different place.

Time influences this process in a very simple yet powerful way. What authors can also mix are past conventions, or past forms of conventions. For example, hardboiled detective story would sure look different today, at least to a point, than a few decades ago when these stories were quite popular. Therefore, would it be considered invention if an author would simply hop back to this old set of conventions but keeping current temporal context? In some cases, it would be considered innovation, in others simply reiterating the same old things. But there are whole genres or sub-genres that grew out of

these attempts, like "steampunk".[22] Steampunk shows that situating certain archaic elements into modern times, or vice-versa, can provide a retro-fantastic setting, where the stories of Jules Verne, for example, were considered futuristic science fiction in their day.

In essence, innovation has its final value on some scale, even if that value is being contested regularly. If we imagine invention as a value, that means that below it there are other works that are maybe not pure invention, but that we can use to more granularly decide where our work is located on such a scale between invention and convention. In the case of "Firefly", for example, it is situated rather near the invention part for a SF TV show; however, not so for a western show. This is another important part. If we are dealing with conventions from few different formulas in one body of work, we need to bring in quantification as well as exact contextualization into invention. This contextualization is not only dependent of existing definitions of formula, or expectations of audiences for such a work; indeed, this contextualization also needs a time component, which means that producing a work of convention becomes more of a process that we can view in a single point in time and space, but that we also need to track during its entire lifetime. It is also a matter of contextualizing according to changes in time of formula itself; as could be reasoned from above sentence, SF TV show, as in, its formula, has long been stuck in one single form, so introduction of new elements from other formula moved it a long way up the scale towards innovation. On the other hand, western formula is very well developed, in all its several forms, so there is nothing that SF could do for it, so to speak.

Conclusion

In this article, I have reviewed one of the more influential concepts in popular culture studies, that of a *formula*, that is culturally bound and created on a set of *conventions*. These conventions allow such works of literature, or indeed any medium of production, to have a repeatable quality to it, which leads to a possibility of known expectations. These, again and in turn, lead to formulation of *escapism*, or to be more precise, of a form of escapism which formula can deliver to audiences (consumers) that need it.

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[22] "Steampunk" is a sub-genre of science fiction that was created in 1980s. It was named after another sub-genre of science fiction, *cyberpunk*; the main difference is that instead of high-tech computers that are clearly rooted in our age, but more advanced, entire technological and science "stack" of this setting are rooted in steam-engine era, so mostly Victorian England. More on this can be found on Wikipedia http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Steampunk.

In anthropology, formula can be of great help not only as a better tool for analysis of popular culture *per se*, but as a door to an enhanced understanding of the broader cultural context that produced the work of the popular art in question. After all, if a work of folklore helps us understand the group that perpetuates it, conventions that brought upon a mass-distributed work (like any item in popular culture is by necessity) are sure to help us understand the context that produced them.

However, Cawelti has not paid close attention to the influence of time on both formula and the forms of escapism. As I have shown, it is very important to take into account these two changes, since they are what makes formula a valid concept still quite usable in today's studies of popular culture.

There cannot be a fixed property, at least fixed in the way Cawelti suggested, in anything relating to culture, since, as a set of practices that human beings employ to shape their behavior, culture is subjected to passage of time as anything else. Therefore, anything that reflects the cultural context in which it was made needs to account for its own changes in a diachronic perspective; otherwise, we are left with an incomplete theoretical apparatus.

Of course, this all begs the question why would this line in inquiry be so important?

We are living in an age that has revolutionized means of producing content. It started with the written word, but is now not constrained to documents; individuals are now empowered by modern technology to produce videos, music, pictures of any format at an increasing rate. If this was brought on by advancements in technology such as is the personal computer, commoditization of communication technologies as well as advent of the Internet, has provided increasing means of how to get the content distributed and published.

This has brought about a renewed interest in popular culture *per se*, but it can also reinvigorate exploration of other concepts and phenomena that are closely tied with it. If such an environment influences the production of popular culture, then conventions that it is built upon, if we follow Cawelti's model, are sure to be changed, thus possibly showing us, in yet another way, a venue for exploration of diachronic changes in socio-cultural contexts. After all, a principal trait of the new world of communication is both speed and space, or rather compression of them both. This is something that is bound to reflect on an entire socio-cultural contexts, not only popular culture as a whole.

In order to tackle all of these questions, we need to find a way to deal with popular culture. Cawelti gave us a formula; I hope that I have given at least inkling to venues that we can peruse to expand his concept to be better suited for the present day, in which time and space itself are being contested as fixed values.

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Zlatko Knežević

Kako nas vreme gazi: vremenska dimenzija u formulama

U ovom članku sam prikazao koncept *formule* u popularnoj kulturi, definisan od strane Džona Kaveltija (John Cawelti), kao i druga dva izuzetno bitna koncepta: koncept *konvencije* i *eskapizma*. Ova dva druga koncepta su se pokazala kao osnovni stubovi njegove teorijske aparature. Cilj članka je bio da proširi ovih nekoliko koncepata novim saznanjima, kao i da pokuša da objasni zašto je potrebno uvesti komponentu vremena u definicije sva tri koncepta, da bi se mogao pratiti efekat koji ono ima na formulu. Kao primere sam uveo tri naučnofantastične serije. Na kraju, članak se na kratko dotakao odnosa između formula i žanra.

Ključne reči: Cawelti, formula, popularna kultura, žanr, vreme

Zlatko Knežević

Comment nous sommes devancés par le temps:
la dimension temporelle dans les formules

    Dans cet article j'ai développé le concept de la formule dans la culture populaire, défini par John Cawelti, de même que deux autres concepts extrêmement importants: le concept de la convention et de l'escapisme. Ces deux derniers concepts se sont imposés comme piliers de son appareil théorique. L'intention de l'article a été d'élargir ces quelques concepts par de nouveaux contenus, ainsi que de tenter d'expliquer pourquoi il est nécessaire d'introduire la composante du temps dans la définition des trois concepts, pour pouvoir suivre l'effet qu'il produit sur la formule. Je me suis appuyé ici sur trois feuilletons de science-fiction. A la fin, l'article s'attarde brièvement sur le rapport entre les formules et le genre.

    Mots-clés: Cawelti, formule, culture populaire, genre, temps