

"Why Do *You* Keep Watching?"

A Reflection on Contemporary Detective Series

My talk is part of a new project which seeks to address one question: What makes detective series popular today? In the past, scholars have responded that the genre is mainly focused on plot, to the point of becoming a "narrative prototype" (Sternberg, Baroni, Ryan). This approach explains why detective fiction appears to be more limited in its proliferation across media than other genres such as fantasy or science fiction. If plot is the dominant feature of detective fiction, and plot somehow works against proliferation, then why are we still producing and consuming so many detective series? Following Marie-Laure Ryan, I wish to argue that a shift from plot to worldbuilding has occurred in detective fiction. This shift follows the evolution of narrative theory, which in the last decades had to expand to other disciplines and media. In the same way that narratology embraced the new concept of "world," popular series have adopted its potential to proliferate, an aptitude that is now truly part of its aesthetics and poetics.

Another theoretical consensus about detective fiction (especially in its serial form) is that its interest lies in the revisiting of a familiar world about which one knows much, but not all. Crimes and investigations have nearly become pretexts. Serial pleasure comes from repetition. But what readers and spectators particularly love, probably even more than the recurrence of a narrative scheme, is returning to the world of the stories they are so familiar with, that is their "storyworld." Not only are detective fiction storyworlds reassuring, but they have become an essential part of the audience's aesthetic experience. I wish to describe and understand the increasingly important role played by storyworlds in detective fiction so as to better apprehend how popular series are made in our cultural era of mass media production.

Biographical note:

Antoine Dechéne holds a PhD from the Université de Liège, Belgium, and is actually a B.A.E.F. postdoc fellow at Project Narrative. His research deals with all aspects of the metaphysical detective story in the USA and in France. Most notably, Dechéne is the author of *Detective Fiction and the Problem of Knowledge* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2018) and the co-editor with Michel Delville of the first volume dedicated to the genre in French: *Le Thriller métaphysique d'Edgar Allan Poe à nos jours* (Pulg, 2016).