



CARLES PORTA AND TOR: THE INTERSECTION BETWEEN INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM, SENSATIONALISM AND CAPITALIZATION OF A REAL CRIME

MARIA FITÓ-CARRERAS¹, ALFONSO FREIRE-SÁNCHEZ², MONTSERRAT VIDAL-MESTRE³

¹ International University of Catalonia, Spain

² Abat Oliba CEU University, CEU Universities, Spain

³ Autonomous University of Barcelona, Spain

KEYWORDS

True crime
Historical representation
Storyteller
Carles Porta
Tor

ABSTRACT

Introduction: This research focuses on the work of Carles Porta, in particular on Tor, la muntanya maleïda ("Tor, The Cursed Mountain"), a true crime documentary series. The aim of this study is to explore how an investigative journalist adopts the role of a storyteller and transforms a real event into a sensational narrative. Methodology: A content analysis of the series is carried out. Results and discussion: The existence is observed of a distinctive authorial mark characterized by his interventions, interactions and emotional involvement with the characters throughout the narrative. Conclusions: Despite publicly asserting that his work is the result of a well-measured portrayal of reality aimed at not harming the protagonists, Porta employs most of the sensational elements of the genre to construct the narrative, including actively involving the audience by asking them to act as a jury or the emotional involvement of the journalist in handling the real event.

Recibido: 15/ 11 / 2024
Aceptado: 18/ 02 / 2025

1. Introduction

Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) believed that human nature is inherently corrupt. This axiom, according to Hull (2011), provokes a management of human passions influenced by the Hobbesian inner devil of the human being rather than by external threats, a reflection that suggests that evil is not just an external force but an intrinsic part of the human condition capable of committing acts as heinous as murder (Phoebe, 2021). Researchers such as Perchtold-Stefan (2024) and Wiltenburg (2004) consider that, in addition, human beings are fascinated by real crimes, showing interest in the deliberate exposure to highly negative information and morally reprehensible behaviour. This was already anticipated by the psychiatrist Carl Gustav Jung (1875-1961) when explaining this fascination with the formulation of the *mirror law*, according to which each individual has a shadow that represents both the collective and personal unconscious, which is known as the *shadow archetype* (Vidal-Mestre et al., 2023). Tinker (2017) attributes it to the individual's need to identify, empathize and understand others and is based on the hypothesis of a just world in which everything that happens to them, whether good or bad, is deserved. For this author, exposure to real crimes allows people to recognize the darkness of the world and actively seek the opposite.

The attraction of humans to criminal acts is a recurring theme in media and journalism research, highlighting works such as those by Boling and Hull (2018), Maher and Cake (2023) and Vitis and Ryan (2023), among others. The aim of true crime in all its audiovisual possibilities is to arouse strong emotional reactions to enhance its influence on the audience (Wiltenburg, 2004). In television, it includes reality shows, television programmes about criminal events based on sensationalist journalism, dramatized series inspired by real cases, and documentaries (Maher and Cake, 2023).

True crime has become the media genre of the 21st century and one of the most profitable businesses for platforms (Warmedal, 2018), representing 25% of the documentary offers on pay TV and SVOD channels (Daswani, 2024). In 2023, Netflix recorded 117 net hours of content, Amazon Prime Video 356 hours, Discovery+ 278 hours and Paramount+ 115 hours, as revealed by the Ampere Commissioning 2023 report (Iglesias, 2024). Among the range of international titles, highlights include *The Jinx* (Jarecki et al., 2015), *Making a Murderer* (Ricciardi and Demos, 2015), *Mommy Dead and Dearest* (Erin Lee Carr, 2017), *Don't F**k with Cats: Hunting an Internet Killing* (Lewis, 2019), *The Staircase* (de Lestrade, 2018) and *The Murdaugh Murders: A Southern Scandal* (Furst and Willoughby Nason, 2023). In Spain, the most notable works include *Dolores: La verdad sobre el caso Wanninkhof* (Balló, 2021), *Lo que la verdad esconde: el caso Asunta* (Siminiani, 2017), *Las cintas de Rosa Peral* (Vidal Novellas and Pérez Cáceres, 2023), *El caso Sancho* (Luis, 2024) and *El rey del cachopo* (Parrado, 2024), among others.

2. Competing theories: journalism or entertainment?

The relationship between journalism, in particular crime and investigative journalism, combined with the narration of real crimes, finds its maximum manifestation in the true crime documentary. Some authors define it as a journalistic subgenre (Nichols, 1991; Sherrill, 2020), while others consider it a non-fiction genre of literature, film and media that involves real crime stories (Costello, 2018; Webb, 2021). Nichols (1991) also argues that it is a genre that recreates part of history: "documentaries deal with real situations or events and respect known facts; they do not introduce new, unverifiable facts. They speak directly about the historical world rather than doing so allegorically" (p. 28). He adds that real people participate in this who do not act as actors do (Nichols, 2017). In the specific field of the documentary, Bill Nichols (1991) argues that non-fiction visual representations propose textual forms of organizing reality based on conventions to generate an effect of legitimacy or credibility. For Nichols, the so-called 'discourses of sobriety' propose a direct, almost transparent relationship with reality that tends to erase its representative nature. Following this position, authors such as Hernández (2019) and Torres-Hermoso (2017) consider that the genre shares a common heritage with journalism. However, for Webb (2021) the genre cannot be framed within the discipline of journalism:

True crime media is not the same as journalism, nor is it the same as a detective story or other fictional accounts of the resolution and consequences of criminal acts, although the boundaries between journalism, fiction and true crime are sometimes blurred (Webb, 2021, p. 142).

Jean Louis Comolli emphasizes that a documentary is not simply a static record of the past but is inherently influenced by manipulation (Comolli, 2015). Even Seba (2016) talks about sound poetics in

documentaries in general and how it can influence viewers' emotions. Along these lines, for authors such as Ludec (2016), Ross et al. (2022) and Wong and Harraway (2020), true crime narratives tend to be sensationalist, a style that results in high levels of audience penetration. Ludec (2016) defines sensationalism as "a journalistic trend that seeks, in order to value them, extraordinary and scandalous facts" (p. 497). Along the same lines, Joy Wiltenburg (2004) highlights that sensationalism involves emphasizing provocative information to arouse an emotional response. For the author, this phenomenon dates back to mid-16th century Germany, the epicentre of printing where pamphlets were published to recount crimes and the executions of the condemned.

As for contemporary antecedents, there is broad academic consensus that Truman Capote's nonfiction work *In Cold Blood* (1966) set the standard for the transformation of real crimes into sensationalist ones (Franks, 2016; Mora do Campo, 2024; Sligar, 2019). In that period, Costello (2018) considers that the use of sensationalism no longer focuses solely on exploiting the accused's story but on influencing the outcome of the story. An epitome of this vocation was Argosy magazine's *The Court of Last Resort* column, written by Stanley Gardner, creator of the Perry Mason series of fictional lawyer novels. Using sensationalist language and techniques, Gardner challenged contemporary verdicts and helped exonerate wrongfully convicted defendants. The column's impact led to its adaptation into a dramatized television programme on NBC and book publication.

3. Between the classic true crime and the new true crime

The forms in which sensationalism is manifested in the true crime genre have been constantly evolving since the first manifestations in the German written press in the 16th century (Wiltenburg, 2004). In the audiovisual field, Costello (2018) distinguishes two stages of sensationalism in true crime: classic sensationalism -*old true crime*-, prevalent in the television crime narrative of the 20th century, and the current *new true crime*, predominant on VOD platforms.

In the first stage, the author highlights that criminals are presented as reliable narrators through first-person narration of tragic events, including direct dialogue, a resource that allows a strong personal connection to be established with the audience. He also highlights that the narrative style requires the imaginative participation of the audience to complete certain passages of the plot. The family backgrounds of criminals are often shown to increase the visceral effect in the audience. As for narrative devices, music and stylistic decoration are used to evoke certain feelings in the audience, while extremely graphic descriptions of violence are used to heighten emotions. On the other hand, wooden images are used together with written reports so that the illiterate public can interact with the material visually. Finally, he adds that the true crime narrative implicitly underlines the importance of the story due to its veracity.

Over the past three years, the genre has undergone a comprehensive transformation, the key to which lies in narrative innovation (Cecil, 2020). For Yardley et al. (2019), two substantial changes have been introduced with respect to the traditional narrative itinerary. Firstly, the prominence acquired by the accused as a fundamental piece in constructing the narrative, and secondly, the ability to motivate the audience by awakening their activism to solve the case themselves, creating online communities for this purpose, a phenomenon known as armchair detectives. Regarding the first issue, Young (2010) observes that in the era of streaming, the monolithic idea between the good and the bad is distorted, being a defining mark of the new narrative complexity, especially when the true crime revolves around a person who has been unfairly convicted. In this regard, Buozis considers that the criminal can be a key source in the process of generating the truth of true crime (Buozis, 2017, p. 258). Regarding the second issue, the fact that the audience investigates the case is configured as a complement to the entertainment experience that does not attempt to "provide an impartial account of what happened, but rather to achieve the approval of a persuaded audience that must join the call to action to defend or condemn the alleged criminal" (Romero Dominguez, 2020, p. 16). For Partridge (2018), it contributes to providing the feedback necessary to ensure the success of productions. An example of this is *Making a Murderer* (Ricciardi and Demos, 2015), which managed to create an online debate among viewers about different theories surrounding the case.

4. The characteristics of contemporary true crime and its relationship with history

As pointed out by Costello (2018), we are currently facing the era of new true crime, which is inspired by the rhetoric of classic sensationalism with a new purpose: to influence the outcome of specific cases, especially when they are pending judicial resolution. The author considers that, in these cases, the narrative perspective of true crime authors can influence public perception and encourage speculation around it. Directors such as Joe Berlinger (*Paradise Lost*, 1996; *Conversations with a Killer: The Ted Bundy Tapes*, 2019), Errol Morris (*The Thin Blue Line*, 1988), Andrew Jarecki, Marc Smerling and Zac Stuart-Pontier (*The Jinx*, 2015), Laura Ricciardi and Moira Demos (*Making a Murderer*, 2015), and Jean-Xavier de Lestrade (*The Staircase*, 2004) have amply demonstrated the genre's ability to stimulate the creation of a parallel universe of critical discussion around real events. The filmmakers, each with their own unique style of narration and research, have become storytellers with a distinctive personal seal, which could be assimilated to the concept of auteur cinema, understood as a product of the director's personal expression (Gutiérrez-Correa, 2014).

Along these lines, Tinker (2017) points out that one of the characteristics of current true crime is that it lets the viewer decide after consuming the story (Tinker, 2017). Partridge (2018) adds that the directors of these productions do not want to persuade viewers about the guilt or innocence of the alleged perpetrators. Rather, they construct the story from an emotional experience in which the audience apply their emotions and become the jury. On a formal level, the new true crime is presented with a serialized narrative (Bruzi, 2016; Lando, 2024; Moratelli, 2021) due to "the large number of details, subplots and mysteries to be revealed that make up the constellation of a story" (Lando, 2024, p. 204). To enliven factual content and sustain long multi-episode series, Maher and Cake (2023) argue that, in dramatic narrative disposition, revelations or cliffhangers –leaving a plot at a point of high tension or uncertainty at the end of an episode– are configured as valid tools. And, although true crime often seeks a resolution, it often leaves interpretations open to speculation (Rabinowitz, 2011).

As in classic true crime narratives, a trusted narrator –not necessarily the author of the events– is established, which allows the creation of an emotional connection between the viewer and the narrator. This results in an audience that is more receptive to the story and the message intended by the producers (Costello, 2018). In general terms, the figure of the narrator is key to giving a certain meaning to the narrative, as Roland Barthes pointed out in his study on the structural analysis of stories (Barthes, 1970). For Sánchez-Esparza et al. (2023) "the focus that the journalist places when narrating certain events completely conditions the construction of the story and its rhetorical effect" (p. 30). Otway (2015) argues that the figure of the narrator raises delicate questions about truth, lies and the power embedded in authorship.

The presence of a narrator, especially an unreliable one, challenges the documentary's claim to truth, particularly when their credibility is compromised. This is especially relevant in true crime, where sometimes it is a serial killer, a convict or even someone clinically diagnosed as a pathological liar who narrates their story. However, Sánchez-Esparza et al. (2023) point out that in true crime "the viewer is hooked through the characters. Therefore, the guiding thread is formed by direct or indirect witnesses of the events, who are humanized in the series to facilitate the emotional connection with the public" (p. 33). Helich-Lopes and Gomberg (2023) consider that the success of these products and the interest of the public is due to placing the narrative focus and point of view on the murderer, understanding their mind, their motivations and following their life path through the actor's reconstruction, which leads the viewer to witness real life lived as a spectacle. For her part, Evans (2020) states that recreations are used to make fragmentary memory visible and material.

Regarding the narrative timelines, Chauhan et al. (2024) argue that true crime documentary makers seek to find the most accessible way to present an action and make it understandable to the audience. They therefore apply numerous temporal ellipses (Gerbase, 2014). The use of this technique gives the viewer an idea of what happened during that time period. However, the authors consider that this issue becomes problematic when the lines between fiction and reality become blurred because the moment a camera enters any kind of realm, a certain degree of fiction becomes inevitable. Therefore, a true crime documentary contains no inherent truth. According to Linda Williams (1993), it is not like an essential truth, but rather a set of strategies aimed at selecting from a range of relative and circumstantial truths. To identify temporal elisions, intertitles are used to help the audience locate themselves at the specific moment in which the events occur. These intertitles also have the function of placing the audience in a

certain place. According to Nichols (2017), this canonical technique of journalism coincides with the expository mode used in this type of documentary.

Regarding other visual elements of the narrative, Bruzi (2016) identifies as visual variables of the new true crime the use of double exposure shots and exaggeratedly slow cross-fades and an elegant moving camera, as well as black and white factual images to evoke the criminals' past and shots of desolate landscapes. As for the music, intrusive scores with resonances that recreate the mood of the scenes prevail.

5. Tor: Carles Porta and the work of a lifetime

This article focuses on the work of journalist Carles Porta, in particular on the Tor case: a crime that took place in a small Spanish village in the Catalan Pyrenees that remains unsolved to this day. Porta has been investigating the case for almost 30 years, which has led to the production of *Tor, la muntanya maleïda* (2024), a documentary series in the true crime genre. The aim of the study is to explore how an investigative journalist adopts the role of a storyteller and transforms a real event into a sensationalist story. Specifically, a content analysis of the 8 episodes of the documentary series, with an average duration of about 50 minutes, was carried out.

The journalist, writer, director, producer and screenwriter Carles Porta has an extensive professional career, primarily linked to 3Cat and Catalunya Ràdio, media outlets of the Corporació Catalana de Mitjans Audiovisuals (CCMA), the Catalan public communication entity. Porta is recognized for his work in the crime reporting genre and has been awarded the National Communication Award and the Ondas Award for the best radio programme for *Crims* (2020-present). In January 1997, he wrote a three-minute report for TV3 news services on the Tor case (Espinosa de los Monteros, 2018). Fascinated by the story, in 1997, he directed a report as part of the *30 Minuts* television franchise in which he narrated the century-old legal battle between the neighbours regarding the ownership of the Tor mountain in a village of 13 houses of the same name located in the Catalan Pyrenees in the Pallars Sobirà region near the border with Andorra, a territory known for harbouring the main smuggling routes between Andorra and Spain. This dispute, which led to the murder of three neighbours, the perpetrator of one of which remains unidentified, points to a financial motive due to the interest that the mountain arouses for the exploitation of wood, smuggling and the location of a ski slope (El Mundo, 2024). After the report was broadcast, as he stated in an interview with Manuel Haro in 2008, Porta had accumulated so much material after spending three months in Tor that he decided to write the book *Tor: tretze cases i tres morts* (La Campana, 2005). The publication became a phenomenon and was translated into Spanish (Anagrama, 2006) and German (Berlin Verlag, 2007).

After almost 30 years, in 2018 he wrote and directed the 25-episode non-fiction podcast series *Tor, tretze cases i tres morts*, which was broadcast on Catalunya Radio. Six years later, the documentary version *Tor, la muntanya maleïda*, produced by 3Cat, Goroka, Ikiru Films and True Crime Factory, a production company specialising in real crimes, was released. Tor's narrative is presented in 8 episodes, which are available on 3Cat and Atresmedia. The last episode of the docuseries, broadcast live on 3Cat, recorded an audience share of 23.1% and 453,000 viewers. The average audience share for the entire series was 19.2% (Palés, 2024). The documentary focuses on clarifying who was responsible for the murder in 1997 of Josep Montané i Baró, known as Sansa, who at that time was the sole owner of the Tor mountain. The fights over the ownership of the mountain have their origins at the end of the 19th century, when the residents of Tor formed a co-owners' association to acquire the mountain, establishing in their statutes that only permanent residents of the town could be owners. In 1995, a court ruling declared Josep Montané i Baró the sole owner of the mountain, as he was the only one who lived in the town all year round. Jordi Riba Segalàs, alias Palanca, also a resident of Tor, confronted Sansa, arguing that he was also a co-owner by right despite the final ruling. From that moment on, the tensions between Sansa and Palanca became more evident.

After the last episode was broadcast, Porta was interviewed by journalist Albert Om in the special episode *Entrevista a Carles Porta: la historia de Tor, el treball de tota una vida* [Interview with Carles Porta: The story of Tor, the work of a lifetime] (3Cat, 2024). The journalist said about the case: "I don't want to admit that it's an obsession, but it really is". He believes that people have had fun with Tor, which was what he was seeking. Om asks him why he asks the public to play the role of judge, to which Porta replies that people should be able to get involved in justice processes: "My role is not that of an accuser,

but rather that of a narrator. I don't want to judge, I just narrate and explain, I explain what I've found and present it to you in such a way that you can gain some clue or conviction about the case".

Porta tries to portray the events honestly, something that the protagonists of these stories acknowledge. He points out that one of his obsessions is to adhere to reality and to manipulate it as little as possible. For the journalist, the sociology of the case is so incredible that the characters would be impossible to invent and hardly credible if they were part of a fictional narrative. Regarding his involvement in the case, Porta points out that the process is divided into two phases: the first is the approach and mimicry with the characters in order to enter into their lives, and the second is the narration of the events. He believes that in this last phase you must not only keep in mind the character who has told you about their life, but also the viewer, which forces you to distance yourself, eliminating the emotional or intimate part and determining how to convey the character of this person to the viewer in the most honest way possible, trying to present the character as you saw them in the first phase. Regarding the reaction of the characters that appear in the series, Porta states that he had conversations with each of them to explain to them in which episode they would appear and how the story would be told:

Some people didn't like each other. This situation causes me pain because in some way you are exposing to many people points of that person that they don't expose. But it's not like it's an intimacy... Because everything has happened with light and without betrayal (Porta, 2024).

Porta claims that the story ends up being highly measured so as not to overemphasize it, but maintaining a certain balance so as not to fall short and so that the story is understood correctly. Regarding his involvement in the narrative, he states that at first he had doubts about whether or not to appear. He believes that he was trained in the school of journalism in which the journalist is not the news, but that was already the case with the book. However, thanks to that book, in which he tells the story in the first person, he realized that becoming the narrator and entering the story was a wonderful formula. Despite not feeling comfortable, he thinks that, if he strips the characters bare, why not do it himself?

6. Objectives and method

The aim of this study is to explore through a case study and content analysis how an investigative journalist adopts the role of a storyteller and transforms a real fact into a sensationalist story. This method is suitable for researching contemporary issues over which the researcher has no direct control (Yacuzzi, 2005), as it allows the questions of why and how of a given reality to be answered (Yin, 2014). We consider that content analysis involves the systematic application of previously established rules (Sánchez-Aranda, 2005). Specifically, the rules of this research consist of 18 independent variables based on characteristics of classic true crime and new true crime, compiled through a literature review carried out to gather the current literature (Table 1).

Table 1. Content analysis variables.

Variable	Description
Serialization	Serialized narrative (Bruzi, 2016; Moratelli, 2021; Lando, 2024).
Narrative arc	Temporal ellipses to make the narrative understandable to the audience (Chauchan et al., 2024). Revelations and cliffhangers (Maher and Cake, 2023). Plot twist (Moratelli, 2021). Open interpretations (Rabinowitz, 2011). Narrative patterns are repeated with other true crimes (Helich-Lopes and Gomberg, 2023).
Narrator	First-person narration. Direct dialogue from the criminal (Costello, 2018). Trusted narrator (Costello, 2018; Chauchan et al., 2024). Narrator protagonist, direct and indirect witnesses (Sánchez-Esparza et al., 2023).

Narrative style	Requires the imaginative participation of the audience to complete certain plot passages (Costello, 2018).
Descriptions	The extremely graphic descriptions of violence (Costello, 2018).
Vocation	The importance of the story is implicitly emphasized due to its veracity (Costello, 2018).
Call to action	Motivating the audience by awakening their activism to solve the case (Yardley et al., 2019).
Roles	The monolithic idea between good and bad is distorted (Young, 2010).
Sources	Single or multiple sources (Sánchez-Esparza et al., 2023). Verbal or documentary (Sánchez-Esparza et al., 2023). Official or unofficial (Sánchez-Esparza et al., 2023). Institutional or non-institutional (Sánchez-Esparza et al., 2023). Public or exclusive (Sánchez-Esparza et al., 2023).
Shots	Double exposure (Bruzi, 2016). Exaggeratedly slow cross-fades (Bruzi, 2016). Elegant moving shots (Bruzi, 2016). Desolate landscapes (Bruzi, 2016).
Documentary resources	Audiovisual design based on photos and videos of the crime scene - <i>evidence verité</i> - produces a realistic, believable effect, which builds the truth of the narrative (Fiorini, 2023).
Decoration	Stylistic decorative elements (Costello, 2018).
Symbols	Wooden images along with written reports (Costello, 2018).
Hypertextuality	Intertitles to place the audience in a temporal and spatial moment (Nichols, 2017).
Colorimetry	Black and white images to evoke past events (Bruzi, 2016).
Reconstructions	Participation of actors to visualize facts (Helich-Lopes and Gomberg, 2023). Employ recreations to make fragmentary memory visible and material (Evans, 2020).
Music	Intrusive resonant scores (Bruzi, 2016). Music to evoke emotions (Costello, 2018).
Sound effects	Diegetic and non-diegetic sounds (Fiorini, 2023). They describe the characteristics of a place. They can function as a background or become the main element of the scene. They have a psychological impact on the characters and the viewer (Seba, 2016).

Source: Authors' own creation, 2024.

7. Dissecting Tor: the cursed mountain and its historical reconstruction

From episode 1, *Un cadàver a Tor* [A Dead Body in Tor], to the eighth episode, *Foc Encès* [A Lit Fire], Carles Porta's true crime documentary *Tor, la muntanya maleïda* interweaves several stories and historical moments: from the present to the reconstruction of the murder of Josep Montané in 1997, including accounts of different moments in the history of Spain, such as the Civil War, and small events that occurred in the small village of Tor, such as the smugglers' route or the idiosyncrasies of its inhabitants. This serialized narrative (Bruzi, 2016; Lando, 2024; Moratelli, 2021) keeps the viewer in suspense by providing a detailed development of the events and characters involved. In the first episode Porta introduces key characters such as Josep Montané 'el Sansa', the victim, and Jordi Riba 'el Palanca', his main adversary and one of the suspects according to the narrative. Other Tor residents, who are treated as characters and pieces of a mystery, are also introduced, as well as the historical context and

central axis of the narrative: the conflict over the ownership of the mountain. To introduce the story, a wide variety of sources are used (Sánchez-Esparza et al., 2023), including oral interviews, official and unofficial documents, and exclusive material obtained by Porta and his research team rather than the police forces.

The story unfolds with increasing tension and, except for the first episode which, as mentioned, is more introductory and contextual, the rest follow a very marked narrative scheme, with patterns that are common in other true crime stories (Helich-Lopes and Gomberg, 2023) such as the gradual presentation of evidence and testimonies that contradict each other. Each episode concludes with significant revelations or cliffhangers (Maher and Cake, 2023) that leave the viewer wanting to know more. Typically, in the last few minutes of each episode, a character is introduced who appears to be the culprit of Josep Montané's murder, although in the following episode new clues are provided that suggest otherwise. An example of this occurs at the end of the second episode, when a clue is discovered that raises new questions, leaving the audience eager to find out what happens in the next episode. These moments of revelation are carefully designed to maintain suspense and make the story longer and richer in nuance and complexity, even until the end, when Porta acknowledges not having been able to solve the crime and motivates the audience to actively get involved, either by sharing relevant information or supporting causes related to justice (Yardley et al., 2019).

Although the use of certain temporal ellipses is observed (Chauhan et al., 2024), which allows the plot to quickly advance through events that are inconsequential to the main narrative, there is also a lot of reiteration of the same facts that are considered important. In the second episode, for example, the passage of time between the murder and the discovery of Josep Montané's body is treated elliptically, focusing on the shock of the discovery and the start of the investigation. However, some of the details about how the body was found are repeated numerous times and in different episodes, using them to compare different theories about the suspects. This handling of time allows Carles Porta to play with the viewers, to introduce deceptive elements to fool the public, which Alfred Hitchcock (1899-1980) called *McGuffins*, and, on the other hand, to use scriptwriter tricks such as 'sowing and reaping', by placing small clues or elements that serve to advance the plot in new episodes.

Another narrative resource that Porta uses is the plot twist (Moratelli, 2021). An example of this occurs in the fourth episode, when an unexpected witness appears and offers a completely different version of the events, which allows us to question previous assumptions about Sansa's murder. This plot twist adds complexity to the plot and keeps the viewer questioning what is true and what is not. Furthermore, both at the end of each episode and at the end of the true crime, Porta leaves certain aspects of the case open to interpretation (Rabinowitz, 2011), allowing the audience to draw their own conclusions about the guilt and motivations of those involved. Recall that Porta had asked the audience to act as a popular jury, which Yardley et al. (2019) dubbed a *call to action*. On the other hand, the narrative style requires the audience's imaginative participation to complete certain passages of the plot (Costello, 2018). For example, in the sixth episode, the events of the night of the crime are described without showing explicit images, obliging the viewer to imagine the scene, introducing elements typical of a crime novel.

As the narrator, Carles Porta uses first-person narration (Costello, 2018) that provides an intimate, personal perspective of the case. His calm but firm voice guides the viewer through the intricate details of the case. In the third episode, he directly recites the suspect's words during an interview, which intensifies the emotional connection with the audience and adds a layer of authenticity to the narrative. Porta quickly establishes himself as a reliable narrator (Chauhan et al., 2024; Costello, 2018), providing historical context and precise details that validate his credibility. The narrative alternates between the perspective of the narrator protagonist, i.e. Carles Porta, and direct and indirect witnesses (Sánchez-Esparza et al., 2023). For example, in the fifth episode, the testimony of a neighbour who observed crucial events from their window is included, adding a multifaceted view of the case. This diversity of perspectives enriches the narrative and allows for a more complete understanding of the events and also provides elements more typical of the investigative genre (Nichols, 2017).

The descriptions of violence are graphic and detailed (Costello, 2018), especially in the second episode in which Porta describes the state of the body found in his home. This attention to graphic detail is not gratuitous, but serves to emphasize the brutality of the crime and the emotional impact on the community. The documentary constantly underlines the veracity of the story (Costello, 2018),

highlighting the real importance of the events presented. This is emphasized in the first episode in which a montage of news headlines and reports about the case establishes the serious tone of the event.

The documentary distorts the monolithic idea of the good and the bad (Young, 2010). It presents some of the criminals in a human light, showing their motivations and circumstances, while some of the victims are shown to have flaws and faults of their own. For example, *el Sansa* is revealed to have had previous disputes and enemies and is even revealed to have had poor relations with his family and neighbours, which complicates the perception of his victimization. The same occurs with *el Palanca*, a citizen who during the first seven episodes is treated as a suspect and a dark and dangerous individual, while in the last chapter his more human side is dealt with.

In terms of visual elements, the documentary employs techniques such as cross-fades (Bruzi, 2016) to create an immersive atmosphere. In the third episode, images from the past are superimposed on the present and cross-fades are used to transition between scenes. Similarly, the use of elegant shots of desolate landscapes is reiterated to establish the tone and setting (Bruzi, 2016). From the documentary's opening and throughout all its episodes, the desolate landscapes of the village of Tor reflect the loneliness and mystery surrounding the case. Another characteristic aspect of the series' visual identity is the model of the village where the events take place and figures of the villagers, such as a smuggler transporting contraband packages, the cemetery, vehicles covered in snow, armed hunters, etc. Other elements include photographs and real images of the protagonists that have been tinted in yellow to simulate the passage of time, papers that burn, recalling when the Muntané house burned down in the 1930s, and the embers of the fire, the visual leitmotif of true crime that recalls the main conflict.

On the other hand, the recreation of the events is supported by the use of photos and videos of the crime scene, known as *evidence verité* (Fiorini, 2023), with the aim of increasing the narrative's realism and verisimilitude. In the second episode, images of the crime scene are shown alongside the narration, creating a visual impact that reinforces the seriousness of the case. Scenery elements and symbols, such as written reports (Costello, 2018), add depth and visual context to the documentary. In the fifth episode, written reports are shown alongside visual recreations of the events described, which helps to contextualise and give weight to the testimonies presented. Intertitles (Nichols, 2017) are used to place the audience temporally and spatially, while black and white images (Bruzi, 2016) in different episodes evoke past events, creating a visual contrast with the present that helps to highlight the evolution of the case. The documentary also uses actors to recreate events (Helich-Lopes and Gomberg, 2023), helping to visualize and materialise the fragmentary memory of the events. In the fourth episode, detailed recreations of the events based on the testimonies are presented, allowing the viewer to see how the events could have occurred (Evans, 2020).

Some of the aspects that do not coincide with other true crime stories are the absence of intrusive music with resonances (Bruzi, 2016) or scores designed to evoke feelings (Costello, 2018). In contrast, importance is given to the silence that evokes the snowy mountain. Although the song *Tor qui t'ha mort*, sung in a deep voice by Roger Mas, was written and created ad hoc for the true crime series, in the episodes the soundtrack has a very subtle narrative value, is not usually in the foreground and is composed of traditional musical instruments with folkloric overtones that, in this way, respond to the sound poetics (Seba 2016). This is observed, for example, in the sound effects, both diegetic and non-diegetic (Fiorini, 2023), which describe the characteristics of the places and psychologically affect the characters and the viewer. The ambient sounds of the village of Tor are used to create an atmosphere of mystery and solitude in the first episode, underlining the isolation and tension that characterizes the case, the loneliness of the snowy mountain and the gloom of its tracks at night.

8. Conclusions

This work has shown that *Tor, la muntanya maleïda* follows the traditional narrative itinerary of true crime, introducing many of the features that characterize the sensationalist genre. This contradicts Carles Porta himself when he repeatedly states that his job is to "explain crime stories without using yellow or red" (Porta, 2021), that is, getting to the heart of true crime without imbuing the narrative with the sensationalism prevalent in this genre. Although the journalist states in several interviews that his work is the product of an exercise in objectivity, he involves himself in the narrative on both an emotional and visual level, just as directors such as Andrew Jarecki did in *The Jinx* (2015) and Lestrade

in *The Staircase*, admitting in front of the cameras the esteem he feels for some of the characters involved in the case and establishing intense personal relationships.

We believe that Porta's emotional involvement in the case during 27 years of intense investigation, which he defines as an "obsession", may damage the presentation of the facts objectively. Although it is almost impossible to avoid establishing personal relationships with the plot protagonists, in *Tor* this does not undermine the honesty with which the facts are reported, although it does undermine Porta's absolute impartiality. On the other hand, in line with what Kaiser-Moro (2018) pointed out in her research on the intimate documentary *Mapa* (Siminiani, 2012), we believe that *Tor* could be located in authorial autofiction, as Porta acts as a "commentator and verifier of the images that develop" (Kaiser-Moro, 2018, p. 181).

Therefore, the results allow us to define the true crime series *Tor* as being the intersection between investigative journalism in that it compares sources, is based on true, objective data, and aims to go beyond the obvious through testimonies, evidence and all kinds of elements, employing in-depth field work carried out by Porta and his team for more than thirty decades. However, it is more the way he recounts it, how he plays with the viewers with all kinds of resources more typical of cinema and scriptwriters such as the cliffhanger or the McGuffin, and the use of audiovisual techniques and reordering of the story that positions him towards sensationalism and turns Porta into a true storyteller, a storyteller who knows how to mix reality with speculation, history with the present, and who turned the narration of a real crime into the capitalization of a real event brought to factual entertainment in different media, formats and platforms. This does not diminish the relevance of his great ability to convey history and reality to viewers who would otherwise possibly have never known this part of the history of a small village in the Catalan Pyrenees.

References

- Avendaño, T. (24 March 2019). El documental de televisión ya no resume los titulares: los cambia. *El País*. <https://bit.ly/4eVAPcs>.
- Barthes, R. (1970). Introducción al análisis estructural de los relatos. In R. Barthes (ed.), *Análisis estructural del relato* (pp. 9-43). Editorial Tiempo Contemporáneo.
- Berlinger, J. and Sinofsky, B. (dirs) (1996). *Paradise Lost: The Child Murders at Robin Hood Hills*. HBO.
- Berlinger, J. (dir) (2019). *Conversations with a Killer: The Ted Bundy Tapes*. Netflix.
- Boling, K. S. and Hull, K. (2018). Undisclosed Information—Serial Is My Favorite Murder: Examining Motivations in the True Crime Podcast Audience. *Journal of Radio & Audio Media*, 25(1), 92-108. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19376529.2017.1370714>.
- Bruzi, S. (2016). Making a Genre: The Case of the Contemporary True Crime Documentary. *Law and Humanities*, 10(2), 249-280. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17521483.2016.1233741>.
- Buozis, M. (2017). Giving voice to the accused: Serial and the critical potential of true crime. *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies*, 14(3), 254-270. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14791420.2017.1287410>
- Cecil, D. K. (2020). *Fear, Justice, & Modern True Crime*. Lynne Rienner Publishers.
- Chauhan, A., Alappat, J., & Raturi, P. (2024). Deconstructing True Crime, Reconstructing ‘Truth’: An Analysis of Netflix’s Conversation with a Killer: The Ted Bundy Tapes. *Vantage Journal of Thematic Analysis*, 5(1), 34-47. <http://dx.doi.org/10.52253/vjta.2024.v05i01.05>
- Comolli, J.L. (2015). Cinema against Spectacle: Technique and Ideology Revisited. *Amsterdam University Press eBooks*. <https://doi.org/10.5117/9789089645548>.
- Costello, D. (2018). Un-Making a Murderer: New True Crime Sensationalism and the Criminal Justice System, Introduction. *55 Am. Crim. L. Rev. Online*: 77-82.
- Daswani, M. (20 June 2024). TV Real Festival Showcases Ampere Commissioning Data. *Worldscreen.com*. <https://bit.ly/3LaVGeq>.
- de Lestrade, J.X. (dir.) (2004). *The Staircase*. Canal +.
- El Mundo (20 June 2024). La leyenda negra de la montaña de Tor: 30 años de investigación, cien años de rencillas, secretos, casas quemadas y asesinatos. <https://bit.ly/3VSFDaj>.
- Espinosa de los Monteros, M. J. (2018). ‘Tor’: el ‘ Fargo’ catalán en formato podcast. *El País*. <https://bit.ly/3VSLxYO>.
- Evans, B. (2020) Screen Memories in True Crime Documentary: Trauma, Bodies, and Places in *The Keepers* (2017) and *Casting JonBenet* (2017). In A.L. Hubbell, N. et al. (eds.), *Places of Traumatic Memory*, Palgrave Macmillan Memory Studies. Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-52056-4_13.
- Fiorini, D. (2023). Diseño audiovisual, representación e interpretación en el género documental. *Cuadernos del Centro de Estudios de Diseño y Comunicación*, 205, 141-151. <https://bit.ly/3WnjUZp>.
- Franks, R. (2016). True Crime: The Regular Reinvention of a Genre. *Journal of Asia-Pacific Pop Culture*, 1(2), 239-254. <https://doi.org/10.5325/jasiapacpopcult.1.2.0239>.
- Gerbase, C. (2014). A elipse como estratégia narrativa nos seriados de TV. *Significação: Revista de Cultura Audiovisual*, 41(42), 67-78. <https://doi.org/10.11606/ISSN.2316-7114.SIG.2014.83420>.
- Gutiérrez-Correa, M. L. (2014). El cine de autor del cine moderno al cine posmoderno. *Razón y Palabra*, 87. <https://bit.ly/4eZbL4v>.
- Haro, M. (2008). Entrevista a Carles Porta por “Tor: la montaña maldita”. *Anikaentrelibros.com*. <https://bit.ly/3VMt7IU>.
- Helich-Lopes, T. & Gomberg, F. (2023). O crime como espetáculo na narrativa documental: a série Netflix sobre Elize Matsunaga. *Mídia E Cotidiano*, 17(2), 1-27. <https://doi.org/10.22409/rmc.v17i2.57783>
- Hernández, M. (2019). True Injustice: Cultures of Violence and Stories of Resistance in the New True Crime. *IdeaFest: Interdisciplinary Journal of Creative Works and Research from Humboldt University*, 3(1), 86-98. <https://bit.ly/3xKvpAE>.
- Hull, G. (2011). Building Better Citizens: Hobbes against the Ontological Illusion. *Epoche*, 20(1), 105-129. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.1927305>.

- Iglesias, E. (25 June 2024). Por qué las historias de crímenes alimentan las arcas de las plataformas de streaming. *Cronista.com*. <https://bit.ly/3XSsAYA>.
- Jarecki, A., Smerling, M., and Stuart-Pontier, Z. (dirs.) (2015). *The Jinx: The Life and Deaths of Robert Durst*. HBO.
- Kaiser-Moro, A. (2018). El cine o la vida. Narraciones del yo en Mapa. *Zer*, 44, 175-191. <https://doi.org/10.1387/zer.19109>.
- Lando, A. (2024). Mainstreaming y representaciones sociales: Netflix y el caso Rosa Peral. *Revista De Estudios Socioeducativos, ReSed*, 1(12). <https://bit.ly/3W5ZrGP>.
- Ludec, N. (2016). El sensacionalismo: una herramienta periodística para escribir sobre las mujeres. In Almuiña, C. et al. (eds.), *Sensacionalismo y amarillismo en la Historia de la Comunicación*, (pp.497-512). Editorial Fragua.
- Maher, S. and Cake, S. (2023). Innovation in True Crime: Generic Transformation in Documentary Series. *Studies in Australasian Cinema*, 17(1-2), 95-109. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17503175.2023.2224617>.
- Mora do Campo, M. M. (2024). El periodismo como estrategia literaria de Truman Capote. *Doxa Comunicación. Revista Interdisciplinaria De Estudios De Comunicación Y Ciencias Sociales*, 38. <https://bit.ly/4bHLQLK>.
- Moratelli, V. (2021). Elementos da narrativa ficcional no documentário seriado: estudo do arco dramático e das escolhas de edição no produto audiovisual. *Cine-Fórum UEMS*, 2(2). <https://bit.ly/4f4Txym>.
- Morris, E. (dir.) (1988). *The Thin Blue Line*. Miramax.
- Nichols, B. (1991). *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary*. Indiana University Press.
- Nichols, B. (2017). *Introduction to Documentary*. Indiana University Press.
- Otway, F. (2015). The Unreliable Narrator in Documentary. *Journal of Film and Video*, 67(3-4), 3-23. <https://doi.org/10.5406/jfilmvideo.67.3-4.0003>.
- Palés, A. (18 June 2024). Carles Porta, sobre el fin de 'Tor': 'Creo que quien mató a Sansa sale a la serie'. *Ara.cat*. <https://bit.ly/3zxZUKs>.
- Partridge, P. (2018). *Did He Do It?: Judging the Suspect-Protagonist in True Crime Documentaries*. Doctoral dissertation, Wesleyan University.
- Perchtold-Stefan, C., Rominger, C., Fink, A., Simon M. C., Sattler, K., and Veit, S. (2024). Out of the Dark - Psychological Perspectives on People's Fascination with True Crime. *OSF Preprints*. <https://doi.org/10.31219/osf.io/uw7he>.
- Phoebe, L. (2 November 2021). Is Our True-Crime Obsession Doing More Harm Than Good? *International New York Times*, Gale Academic onfile. <https://bit.ly/3WbAOtA>.
- Porta, C. (dir.) (2024). *Tor, la muntanya maleïda*. 3Cat.
- Rabinowitz, P. (2011). Savage Holiday: Documentary Noir and True Crime in 12 Million Black Voices. In A. M. Craven and W. E. Dow (eds.), *Richard Wright. Signs of Race*. Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230340237_8.
- Ricciardi, L. and Demos, M. (dirs). (2015). *Making a Murderer*. Netflix.
- Romero Domínguez, L. (2020). Narrativas del crimen en los documentales de no ficción: éxito del true crime en las plataformas VOD. *Revista Panamericana de Comunicación*, 2(2), 11-20. <https://doi.org/10.21555/rpc.v0i2.2332>.
- Ross, A. M., Morgan, A., Wake, A., and Reavley, N.J. (2022). Pilot Trial of a Media Intervention with Journalism Students on News Reporting of Mental Illness in the Context of Violence and Crime. *Health Promotion Journal of Australia*, 33(3), 602-613. <https://doi.org/10.1002/hpja.537>.
- Sánchez-Aranda, J. J. (2005). Análisis de contenido cuantitativo de medios. In F. López and M. I. Torregrosa (eds.), *Investigar en comunicación: guía práctica de métodos y técnicas de investigación social en comunicación*, (pp. 207-228). McGraw-Hill.
- Sánchez-Esparza, M., Méndiz-Noguero, A. and Berlanga-Fernández, I. (2023). La narrativa transmedia en los true crime: del relato periodístico a las pantallas. El caso de Lucía en la telaraña. *Literatura y Lingüística*, 48, 19-46. <https://doi.org/10.29344/0717621X.48.3255>
- Seba, A. (2016). Diseño sonoro en el documental. Representación y poética. *Imagofagia*, 13. <https://bit.ly/3zK0d51>.
- Sherrill, L. A. (2020). The 'Serial Effect' and the True Crime Podcast Ecosystem. *Journalism Practice*, 16(7), 1473-1494. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2020.1852884>.

- Sligar, S. (2019). In Cold Blood, the Expansion of Psychiatric Evidence, and the Corrective Power of True Crime. *Law & Literature*, 31(1), 21-47. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0067270X.2018.1465281>.
- Tinker, R. (2017). Guilty Pleasure: A Case Study of True Crime's Resurgence in a Binge Consumption Era. *Elon Journal*, 1, 95-107.
- Torres-Hermoso, P. (2017). Revisión sobre el periodismo de sucesos y tribunales. Análisis del tratamiento informativo del Caso Asunta. In N. Muñoz Fernández (ed.), *El ejercicio del periodismo en la sociedad de la información* (pp. 57-76). Egregius. <https://bit.ly/3zGwdXO>.
- Vidal-Mestre, M., Freire-Sánchez, A. and Gracia-Mercader, C. (2023). Los problemas de salud mental como justificación del mal: el caso del Joker. In F. Pomares and L. Morales (eds.), *Cómic y Estudios Culturales: imágenes en movimiento* (pp. 169-196). Ediciones Idea.
- Vitis, L. and Ryan, V. (2023). True Crime Podcasts in Australia: Examining Listening Patterns and Listener Perceptions. *Journal of Radio & Audio Media*, 30(1), 291-314. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19376529.2021.1974446>.
- Warmedal, M. (2018). The Future of High-Quality Documentaries Reaching a World Audience. *Global Investigative Journalism Network (GIJN)*. <https://bit.ly/3Y4500i>.
- Webb, L. (2021). True Crime and Danger Narratives: Reflections on Stories of Violence, Race, and (In)Justice. *The Journal of Gender, Race & Justice*, 24(1), 131-170. <https://bit.ly/3WotE4r>.
- Wiltenburg, J. (2004). True Crime: The Origins of Modern Sensationalism. *The American Historical Review*, 109(5), 1377-1404. <https://doi.org/10.1086/ahr/109.5.1377>.
- Williams, L. (1993). Mirrors without Memories: Truth, History, and the New Documentary. *Film Quarterly*, 46(3), 9-21. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1212899>.
- Wong, J. S. and Harraway, V. (2020). Media Presentation of Homicide: Examining Characteristics of Sensationalism and Fear of Victimization and Their Relation to Newspaper Article Prominence. *Homicide Studies*, 24(4), 333-352. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1088767919896391>.
- Yacuzzi, E. (2005). El estudio de caso como metodología de investigación: teoría, mecanismos causales, validación. *Working Papers* 296, Universidad del Centro de Estudios Macroeconómicos de Argentina (UCEMA). <https://bit.ly/3xUUHFQ>.
- Yardley, E., Kelly, E., and Robinson-Edwards, S. (2019). Forever Trapped in the Imaginary of Late Capitalism? The Serialized True Crime Podcast as a Wake-Up Call in Times of Criminological Slumber. *Crime, Media, Culture*, 15(3), 503-521. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1741659018799375>.
- Yin, R. K. (2014). *Case Study Research and Methods*. Sage.
- Young, A. (2010). The Scene of the Crime. Is There Such a Thing as 'Just Looking'? In K. Hayward and T. L. M. Presdee (eds.), *Framing Crime: Cultural Criminology* (pp- 83-97). Routledge.

Audiovisual references

- Balló, R. (Directora). (2021). *Dolores: La verdad sobre el caso Wanninkhof* [Serie documental]. HBO Max.
- Brooks, R. (Director). (1967). *A sangre fría* [Película]. Columbia Pictures.
- Siminiani, E. (Director). (2012). *Mapa* [Película].
- Carr, E. L. (Directora). (2017). *Mommy Dead and Dearest* [Película documental]. HBO.
- De Lestrade, J.-X. (Director). (2018). *The Staircase* [Serie documental]. Netflix.
- Furst, M., & Willoughby Nason, J. (Directores). (2023). *The Murdaugh Murders: A Southern Scandal* [Serie documental]. Netflix.
- Lewis, M. (Director). (2019). *Don't F**k with Cats: Hunting an Internet Killer* [Serie documental]. Netflix.
- Luis, J. (Director). (2024). *El caso Sancho* [Serie documental]. Netflix.
- Siminiani, E. (Director). (2017). *Lo que la verdad esconde: El caso Asunta* [Serie documental]. Atresmedia.
- Parrado, G. (Director). (2024). *El rey del cachopo* [Serie documental]. Netflix.
- Vidal Novellas, M., & Pérez Cáceres, R. (Directores). (2023). *Las cintas de Rosa Peral* [Película documental]. Netflix.