ANTHOLOGICAL INDEXING AND ALGORITHMIC CULTURE: A FRAMEWORK FOR UNDERSTANDING CLASSIFICATION SYSTEMS ON STREAMING PLATFORMS

Giulia Taurino, UdeM Artefact Lab / MIT Open Documentary Lab

While attempting to trace a history of classification, Geoffrey C. Bowker and Susan Leigh Star discussed the tension between preexisting and emergent classification systems, stressing on the nondeterministic nature of digital classification and stating that preexisting cultural grids converge with the affordances of platforms' technologies and infrastructures. More specifically, tagging "systems are active creators of categories in the world as well as simulators of existing categories." (Bowker and Star 2000: 321) Building on previous platform research, this presentation will address forms of identification and indexing of audiovisual content on streaming platforms, by focusing on the "anthological turn" in digital culture (Doueihi 2011). I will notably account for practices of editorial anthologization as they interact with algorithmic-driven classification. The presentation will focus on how content identification and description systems are deployed by one of the major over-the-top players, Netflix. First, I will observe how forms of metadata content identification operate as key classifiers for both identifying content and running queries, therefore generating new ways of accessing and receiving culture. Tagging metadata is just one part of the process of content retrieval. A second system for identifying content by generating collections will be therefore outlined as part as Netflix's platform strategy for filtering streams of content through algorithmic filtering. Algorithmic functions found in hybrid recommender systems - such as content-based filtering and collaborative filtering - are activated on Netflix's library to produce selected, personalized streams. These types of algorithmic filters thus represent secondary processes of classification, once the primary indexing process has been defined through tagging. Even though these two classificatory processes found in digital culture do not create anthologies in the editorial sense of the term, they do create lists having an organizing principle in a way that is similar to the anthological model. I will therefore examine, as a third point, how traditional editorial practices of anthologization intersect with data-driven processes of categorization/identification. I will do so by considering a sample of Netflix's original anthology series as case studies and by evaluating the way they stimulate a double process of content indexing. Evaluation methods will include platform analysis and web scraping. The paper ultimately aims to investigate the interplay between the anthology form and algorithmic processes as they take part in the ordering, structuring and sorting of audiovisual content on Netflix.

Giulia Taurino, Ph.D. is a Postdoctoral Fellow at UdeM Artefact Lab and MIT Open Documentary Lab, with a project focusing on the adaptive navigation in structured archives of immersive content, developed in collaboration with SAT Montreal. Her main research interests include internet studies, digital humanities, knowledge design. She is particularly interested in forms of content organization on online platforms and digital archives, cultural implications of algorithmic technologies, and the intersection between artificial intelligence and the arts. Since September 2019, she is a research affiliate of metaLAB (at) Harvard, where she works on the project "Curatorial A(i)gents", exploring the relation between A.I. and curatorial practices in

museums. Giulia holds a doctorate degree in Media Studies and Visual Arts from the University of Bologna and the University of Montreal. She is a member of Women Who Code and editor for The Programming Historian.