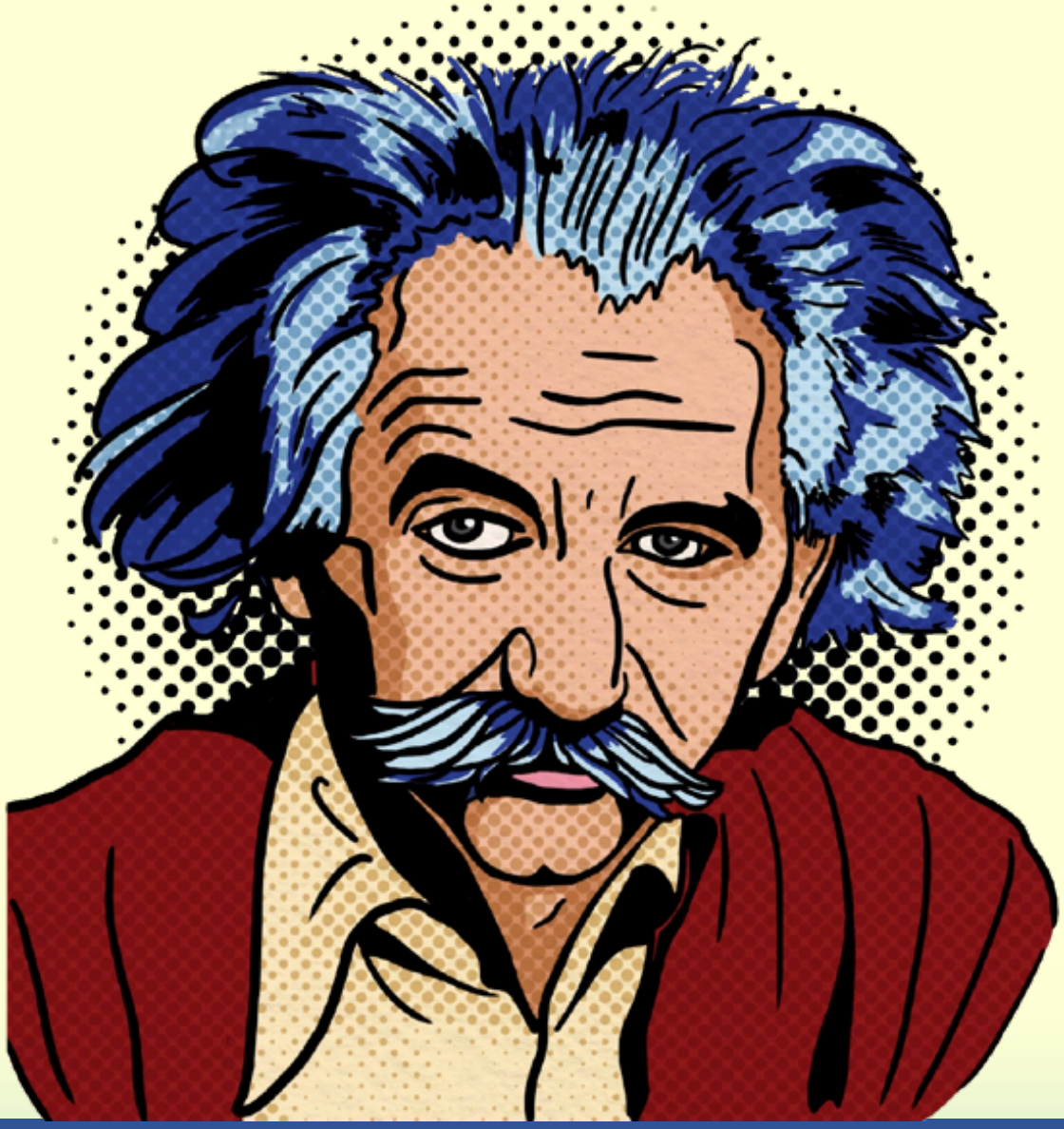

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EDITOR'S FOREWORD

Eleni Alexandri

We are delighted to bring to our readers the 9th edition of *Hortus Semioticus*, which focuses on pop culture, media, and transmediality. The goal behind this issue was to provide a forum for young academics who enthusiastically and professionally approach topics related to these primary themes, and to assist them in demonstrating that the study of pop culture should not be overlooked or discounted academically. We can better comprehend our society, the logic underlying the structure and operation of various industries, as well as the demands and expectations of the public by thoroughly examining pop culture. Furthermore, our society's problematic areas and pathogens are being raised, and we are able to establish an intellectual discourse based on rigorous, methodical observations. On the other hand, media analysis and transmediality are innately semiotic themes that allow pop culture studies to reach new depths and more diverse layers and angles.

We, the editorial team, were also proud to receive articles from all over the world for our thematic issue, and we hope that the channel of communication between Tartu University and other institutions globally will continue to grow in the future. The seven published articles, written in either English, Estonian, or Spanish, feature fresh academic research and exciting findings, and will hopefully not only pave the way for future studies, but will also convince young academics of the importance of our primary issues.

In the first article "Sherlock Holmes of the 21st century: Intersemiotic translation in the BBC series" the author, **Tamara Ovchinnikova**, applies semiotics to highlight the complex and multilayered intertextual elements, as well as the intersemiotic translation of the Sherlock Holmes original novel to the BBC series. By presenting a detailed examination of the series' pilot episode, the author demonstrates how it is more than just a modernisation and a translation of the original text, but a complete conveyance of the source's functionalities, and a development of the detective-stories genre.

Imma Susana Carbajal Vaca and **Hugo David Tiscareño Talavera**'s article "Activaciones semióticas para el violín acompañante: Institucionalización de la inteligencia colectiva emergente en escenarios de educación informal" ("Semiotic activations for the accompanying violin: Institutionalization of collective intelligence emerging from informal education scenarios") aims at drawing attention to the methods by which musical practices are taught, highlighting the gap in formal education that does not adequately equip artists

to perform in the contemporary work sector. In the case study of the violin, semiotics is applied in order to analyse informal learning methods and spaces, as well as to offer a semiotic proposal of musical learning that has the potential to bring a much-needed change to the field of classical pedagogy, and ultimately to assist artists in reaching the point of *musical noesis*.

Samantha Herrerías' article, "Netflix and Narco-pop culture", examines how popular series such as *Narcos: Mexico* are posing as an unofficial history teacher for young audiences, and through remediation manage to re-create and shape cultural memory. Subsequently, the author investigates the negative aspects of these productions, scrutinising their marketing methods and underlying motives, a logic of monetising original stories, a byproduct of our hypermodern, capitalistic society.

Andrew Mark Creighton's article "Postemotionalism, McDonaldization, and transmedial worlds as commodifying mechanisms in fan fiction communities" provides an in-depth examination of the complexities of fan production, evaluating the phenomenon in the light of McDonalization and convergence culture. The author explains how formal rationalisation and implosion, which govern virtual space, are turning leisure into a synonym of labour, and how fan productions, that are continuously providing new material to fuel transmedial worlds, are being monetised by the media and culture industries.

In her article "Totalitarianism in video games: A semiotic analysis of *Beholder*'s narrative", **Eleni Vatala** analyses the dystopian, choice-driven video game *Beholder*, examining the role of agency in the created semiotic space and the structure of the narrative. Finally, the author highlights the cultivated feelings of frustration, which triggers a survival instinct within the player. The Lotmanian perspective Vatala utilises in this text connects the game's virtual architectural environment to another semiosphere with precise boundaries and two distinct levels of semiotic activity.

Heidi Campana Piva's article, "An overview of fan production and participatory culture in the digital age", draws attention, through a comparative historical literature review, to the necessity of developing a methodological framework that could be used to efficiently analyse fan production in the context of participatory and cyber-culture. The author emphasises the complexities of such an endeavour by throwing light on participatory and cyber-culture, their characteristics, and meaning-making processes.

Finally, **Jorge Flore**'s article, "*Ong's Hat* and the Construction of a Suspicious Model Reader", investigates the multimedia narrative of *Ong's Hat*, a group of scientists who reportedly traversed across dimensions. Through different mediums, the textual intricacy of *Ong's Hat* gives a superb illustration of transmediality and textual collaboration. Moreover, the author manages to demonstrate how certain texts have the capacity to confound and manipulate the reader.

This special issue also includes an interview with **Rhea Colaso**, a semiotics master's degree graduate who currently works as the head of marketing at Bedford Row Capital. Rhea discusses pop culture, semiotics and its role in marketing and advertising, and attempts to forecast what the future holds for modern media and our discipline. Finally, **Mohar Kalra**, an American artist and visiting researcher at Tartu University, discusses his interactive artwork and the role of semiotics in his creative process. Rhea and Mohar both provide shining examples of how semiotics may be utilised outside of academia, not merely to investigate phenomena, but also to develop systems of meaning and sophisticated narratives.

Personally, I would like to thank all the people who contributed to the making of this issue, our mentors, all the authors and reviewers, **Andrew Mark Creighton** for co-editing and proofreading, translators and language editors (**Daniel Viveros Santillana**, **Karl Joosep Pihel**, **Keily Tammaru**) and everyone who aided in spreading the word about this *Hortus Semioticus* special issue. I am grateful for all the contributions and happy to see the final result of our common efforts.

This issue was edited by **Eleni Alexandri** and **Andrew Mark Creighton**, with the assistance of **Katre Pärn** and **Nelly Mäekivi**. The edition's cover art was created by **Heidi Campana Piva**.

SHERLOCK HOLMES OF THE 21ST CENTURY:

Intersemiotic translation in the BBC series

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Abstract. The present article aims to analyse the first episode of the British TV series *Sherlock* as an example of intersemiotic translation with regard to the multimodal conception of translation and intertextuality. The second chapter of the article is dedicated to the discussion of concepts relevant to the analysis. The notion of translation is reviewed according to the works of Roman Jakobson and Klaus Kaindl. Mode, medium and genre are introduced as essential components in the intersemiotic translation, which are closely connected and constitute a coherent whole. Furthermore, the notion of intertextuality and its place in intersemiotic translation are briefly discussed. The third chapter of the article is dedicated to the analysis of the first episode of the series *Sherlock*. It focuses on the characters of Sherlock, Dr. Watson and the killer, the main clues, and the features of multimodality introduced into the translation by the authors of the series, such as different websites of the characters and an event conducted on social media.

Keywords: intersemiotic translation, intertextuality, multimodality

21. sajandi Sherlock Holmes: intersemiootiline tõlge BBC sarjas

Abstrakt. Käesolev artikkel analüüsib esimest osa briti telesarjast „Sherlock“ kui näidet intersemiootilisest tõlkest, vaadeldud läbi multimodaalse arusaama tõlkest ning intertekstuaalsusest. Artikli teine peatükk käsitleb analüüsi jaoks relevantseid mõisteid. Tõlke mõistet käsitletakse vastavalt Roman Jakobsoni ja Klaus Kaindli töödele. Laadi, meediumi ning žanri, mis on tihedalt seotud ning moodustavad koherentse terviku, tutvustatakse kui möödapääsmatuid intersemiootilise tõlke komponente. Peale selle käsitletakse lühidalt intertekstuaalsuse mõistet ning selle rolli intersemiootilises tõlkes. Artikli kolmas peatükk on pühendatud Sherlocki telesarja esimese osa analüüsile, keskendudes Sherlocki, Dr. Watsoni ja tapja tegelaskujudele, peamistele juhtlõngadele ning multimodaalsuse tunnusjoontele, mille sarja loojad tõlkesse toovad. Viimaste hulka kuuluvad tegelastele pühendatud erinevad veebisaidid ning sotsiaalmeedias läbi viidud sündmus.

Märksõnad: intersemiootiline tõlge, intertekstuaalsus, multimodaalsus

Sherlock Holmes del Siglo 21: Una Traducción Intersemiótica en la Serie de la BBC

Resumen: Este artículo analiza el primer episodio de la serie de televisión británica "Sherlock" como ejemplo de la traducción intersemiótica. En la primera parte del artículo se discuten brevemente los conceptos relevantes para el análisis. Se revisa la noción de traducción según la obra de Roman Jakobson. A continuación, se presenta la clasificación de la traducción según Klaus Kaindl. Además, la noción de intertextualidad se ilustra con un ejemplo y se discute, se presentan diferentes opiniones sobre el intertexto y el contexto, y se mencionan diferentes herramientas de la manifestación de la intertextualidad. En la segunda parte del artículo, se presenta el episodio y se realiza el análisis. Este se centra en los personajes de Sherlock, el Dr. Watson y el asesino, las pistas principales y los rasgos de multimodalidad introducidos en la traducción por los autores de la serie, como las diferentes páginas web de los personajes y un evento realizado en las redes sociales.

Palabras clave: Traduccion intersemiotica, Intertextualidad, Multimodalidad

Introduction

Sherlock Holmes is one of the most adapted fictional human characters. According to Guinness World Records, in 2012, the most adapted. He has been played by 75 different actors from different countries and, overall, appeared on screen 254 times (Guinness World Records News 2012). The first adaptation of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's work was produced as early as 1900, putting it in the first line of film adaptations worldwide. One recent adaptation of the Sherlock Holmes novels, which probably has drawn as much attention as the original itself, is the series *Sherlock*, which aired on the BBC from 2010 till 2017. Not to make any baseless allegations about its popularity, we can turn to the ratings: the third season became the most viewed British series since 2001, with ratings of up to 12.72 million people tuning in (Jones 2014). It can be assumed that the total number of people who watched the *Sherlock* series is even higher since it also aired overseas and is presented on the most popular online services, such as Amazon Prime, Netflix (until 14.05.2021), iTunes, Vudu, and Google Play. Therefore, being a successful television adaptation, *Sherlock* can serve as a great example of intersemiotic translation. In this paper, we will explore the first episode of the *Sherlock* series. We will try to analyse to which extent it refers to the original, how the main characters were translated, and which intertextual tools can be found in the product of the translation.

1. Intersemiotic translation and intertextuality

In order to define and understand intersemiotic translation, let us first refer to Roman Jakobson's classifications, which divide the process of translation into intralingual, interlingual, and intersemiotic types. Intralingual translation happens when we try to interpret a word with the help of words of the same language (Jakobson 1959). For example, a definition of a word in a dictionary or an oral explanation of a word to a child. Interlingual translation is the process of translating words from one language to another (ibid, 233). It is precisely what translators and interpreters do for their living. The last term was defined by Roman Jakobson as "an interpretation of verbal signs by means of signs of nonverbal sign systems" (ibid, 233). Therefore, in his understanding, the presence of a word was essential. In this case, an example of an intersemiotic translation can be illustrations from a novel, where verbal content is changed into visual. Nevertheless, translation between non-verbal systems is also possible (Dusi Nicola 2015). For example, a theatre play can be inspired by the life of a great person, and later it can move from the stage to the screen. Here, we can see multiple intersemiotic translations: the life of someone is first translated into the language of the theatre and later into the language of cinema. None of the languages mentioned in this example are entirely verbal. Therefore, the notion of intersemiotic translation can be perceived as the most general because it encompasses all the semiotic systems, whereas intralingual and interlingual translations can be considered as its variations.

The question that is there almost every time we talk about translation is: Should the final product be exactly like the source? For a long time, the main aim of a translation was to make an exact equivalent of the original. Nevertheless, today this point of view seems out-dated (Kaindl 2020). The new goal is to translate the function of the text. The notion of the function here requires further clarification. In the functional translation approach, the text itself does not possess any inherent functions. The set of functions is established by the author; however, the receiver interprets this set independently. The set can be interpreted only partially or even differently, depending on the communicative situation of a receiver (Nord 1995). Therefore, when one talks about translating the function of the text, one should also remember that it will be translated from the point of view of the translator, who, as a recipient, can omit some of the functions initially intended by the author.

The shift from the focus on the linguistic properties of the text in translation was accompanied by the development of the notion of multimodality. According to Klaus Kaindl: "Mode, medium, and genre are three building blocks that form the basis for a translation-theoretical approach that serves to overcome the language-centeredness of translation studies" (Kaindl 2020: 57). All three of them are closely intertwined and influence the way and how the recipient perceives the text. If we go to the theatre, we assume that there will be a stage of a kind, and at least one actor presenting in person or virtually. Whereas when we go to the movies, we are not waiting for the actors to perform in front of us in real life. This is a restriction that a medium sets up. At the same time, we may want to watch a particular genre of performance. Here we understand genre as "a number of conventions, which

include topics, characters, character constellations, content, narration, as well as the discursive and formal use of modes" (Kaindl 2020: 57). The genre we have in mind can influence the medium we choose to expose ourselves to. For example, if we want to have a boost of adrenaline and watch something with a lot of explosions and people jumping off of skyscrapers, most probably we will go to the cinema. There is no doubt that theatre performance can include a great deal of elements provoking the release of adrenaline, however, it will be more than surprising for the audience to see an actor jumping off a real skyscraper as a part of a performance. Lastly, modes also rely on and determine the functioning of medium and genre to a certain extent. The notion of mode is not explicitly given in Kaindl's article, however, he refers to Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen where we can find the following definition: "Modes are semiotic resources which allow the simultaneous realisation of discourses and types of (inter)action." (Kress and van Leeuwen 2001: 21) They are socially established, constitute a result of cultural processes, and are inseparable from the medium. The last part requires further elaboration: modes are realised within mediums, but at the same time mediums can be established as modes if they acquire their own 'grammar' (Kress, van Leeuwen 2001). Some mediums can use some certain modes – it may be easier to employ olfactory mode in the theatre than in cinema. At the same time, genres can also be associated with some certain modes – you cannot hear people talking in a pantomime, they use their bodies instead of verbal expressions.

Kaindl perceives mode, medium and genre as 'building blocks' of translation which simultaneously constitute a single coherent whole. Therefore, when we modify one building block, changes in other blocks can follow. This is particularly important when translating from one semiotic system to another, since they may seemingly vary only on the level of one 'building block', which may lead a translator to overlook the others. Furthermore, this introduction of mode, medium, and genre can serve as a basis for a redefinition of translation "as a conventionalised cultural interaction in which a mediator transfers texts in terms of mode, medium, and genre across semiotic and cultural barriers for a new target audience" (Kaindl 2020: 58). Moreover, Kaindl uses these building blocks as a basis for the translation taxonomy, distinguishing intermodal and intramodal, intermedial and intramedial, and intergeneric and intrageneric translations. Nevertheless, he underlines that this taxonomy does not undermine the fact that mode, medium, and genre are closely connected, and that change in one block "fundamentally affects the functional whole" (Kaindl 2020: 60).

There is yet one more 'inter-' to be discussed. Let us start off with an example. Imagine a person who wants to spend a good relaxing evening after a long working week and watch a movie. The choice falls onto Woody Allen's *Match point* of 2005. For the example's sake, we will assume that this person is unfamiliar with Dostoevsky's masterpiece *Crime and punishmen*t. In this scenario, our viewer may perceive the movie as a very tragic and unfair criminal story about how a love affair can go wrong. However, after reading Dostoevsky, new features will be unlocked for the audience. The main character, who turns out to be a killer in the end, is reading *Crime and Punishment* in the first part of a movie. A short scene that does not seem to make a lot of sense until the climax, where the main character murders an old lady, who is his mistress' neighbour, robs her, and murders his

pregnant mistress after that. This is a quite blunt, straightforward, and a little bit of a simple example of an *intertext* – a notion particularly important in the intersemiotic translation. The definition of intertextuality may vary depending on the researcher to whom one turns to seek help. Nevertheless, "the common principle is that, just as signs refer to other signs rather than directly to things, texts refer to other texts" (Dayyeh 1991: 78). If we perceive texts strictly in their literary sense, then the notion of intertextuality is limited to the boundaries of the text and does not expand to the context. However, if we perceive text in its semiotic sense, which is a double-coded entity in a constant process of communication with a reader (Lotman 1988[1981]), then the boundaries of it are broadened. Here, intertextuality embodies not only any other literary text but also a context. There are, however, opinions that intertext and context should be separated. For example, Gérard Genette introduced a term of the paratext, which was subdivided into peritext and epitext. Paratextuality stands for "conventions, that mediate the book to the reader" (Genette 1997[1987]: xviii). When these conventions are mediated within the text, it is a peritext, and outside of it – epitext. Here we would like to make a somehow blunt assumption that paratextuality can be considered a part of intertextuality. Since text is broader than just something written on paper, intertextuality also deals with non-verbal phenomena, hence with non-verbal conventions.

As we can see, texts do not exist in a vacuum; they are influenced by other already existing texts. In the case of the intersemiotic translation, it becomes even more evident. The text, which is translated, and the result of the translation are two formally autonomous entities possessing certain boundaries separating one from the other. At the same time, the latter is an interpretation of the former; thus, it will be influenced by the original to a greater or lesser degree and will refer to the original in some way. There are multiple ways how one text can refer to another. Since intertextuality was conceived as a literary term, the tools with which it can be manifested also belong to the literary world. Here we will mention quotation, allusion, pastiche, parody, irony, and plagiarism (Dayyeh 1991). We can assume that in cases of intersemiotic translations, some of these phenomena may be found in the product of translation.

2. Intersemiotic translation of Sherlock

The translation product to be discussed in this chapter can serve as a good example of how changes in one building block led to changes in the others. The most evident change happened in the realm of the medium: Sherlock travels from the world of the books to the TV screen. However, that inevitably brings changes in modalities (visual, audial) and some shifts in the genre which are to be discussed later.

The first episode of *Sherlock* was aired on 24 October 2010. It is a translation of the first Sherlock Holmes novel – *A Study in Scarlet*. The title of the episode is *A Study in Pink* and from the title alone, we can see that the series is in no way trying

to recreate the original with 100% accuracy. The original name of the story was proposed by Sherlock himself in the end of Chapter IV:

> I might not have gone but for you, and so have missed the finest study I ever came across: a study in scarlet, eh? Why shouldn't we use a little art jargon. There's the scarlet thread of murder running through the colourless skein of life, and our duty is to unravel it, and isolate it, and expose every inch of it. (Doyle 1887: 42)

In the original, the name underlines Sherlock's attitude towards life and crime. For him, life is colourless and crime, which happens, brings colour to it. In the series, the name connects it to the original but also underlines the fact that the series will be something new, something which is not a direct interpretation of the original book. The pink colour has nothing to do with Sherlock but relates to the victim. It serves as another clue in the plot, providing the detective with additional information about the victim's fashion habits and, therefore, her character traits. The creators of the series use the colour pink to bring in novelty and better integrate the 19th-century plot into the modern world.

The episode starts with a scene of a man having a nightmare about a military operation. The soldiers' ammunition and the setting of the room signal to a viewer that the plot will not be happening at the end of the 19th century, but in modern times and that the man is our contemporary. With the help of the context, we can conclude that the man shown to us is Dr. Watson since he served as a military doctor in the original. Therefore, the original text allows us to understand a character's background on the screen without an explicit exposition and without him even saying anything. Further, we can see a proof that the man in front of us is precisely Doctor Watson because he opens his laptop to write "The personal blog of Dr. John H. Watson." The change of newspapers for Internet media is quite common in the series. Modern Sherlock also has his own website called *The Science of deduction*. The name, which coincides with the names of the second chapter of the novel and the first chapter of the story *The sign of the Four*. This is quite an interesting example of peritext becoming an intertext. The next scene is Watson talking to his therapist, and here we can see that the character in the series will be less enthusiastic and joyful than the original one. We find further proof in a scene with Mike Stamford, where Watson is not at least joyful, if not gloomy. He did not hear Mike Stamford calling him, and he seemed detached throughout the conversation. Whereas in the original, we can see: "In old days Stamford had never been a particular crony of mine, but now *I hailed him with enthusiasm*, and he, in his turn, appeared to be delighted to see me. *In the exuberance of my joy*, I asked him to lunch with me at the Holborn, and we started off together in a hansom" (Doyle 1887: 5, my italics). Therefore, we can get the first glimpse of how Dr. Watson was translated in the series: a soldier back from the action, struggling to get back to civilian life, which causes some mental issues. As we later discover in a scene with Mycroft Holmes, these issues are caused not by the trauma from the war but by the lack of the battlefield. Further proof can be found in cab chase scene, where Watson forgets about his injuries the moment the action starts. This can illustrate that changes in mode and medium usually come with changes in content. Some features may be hard to convey by the means of writing, such as

prosodics or eye contact, for example. The visual modality of the series provides better conditions to transmit even the slightest changes in these features. Therefore, it may be assumed, that a new medium gave more opportunities for the translators to deepen the character and express some of his functions that they had perceived as the most relevant. This further transforms the genre itself. The original book did not leave a lot of space for comedic elements, however, they could be met there occasionally. The concentration of the comedic elements of the series is way denser. They reveal new sides of the characters and make them more likeable for the modern audience.

Yet another interesting allusion in the series is connected to Watson's injury. In *A Study in Scarlet* we see that Dr. Watson was injured in his shoulder: "There *I was struck on the shoulder* by a Jezail bullet, which shattered the bone and grazed the subclavian artery" (Doyle 1887: 3, my italics). However, in the later works of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, we can see that the wound relocates from the shoulder to his leg, for example: "More than once during the years that I had lived with him in Baker Street I had observed that a small vanity underlay my companion's quiet and didactic manner. I made no remark, however, but sat nursing my *wounded leg*" (Doyle 1890: 109, my italics). At the beginning of the episode, Watson suffers from a psychosomatic limp, but in the end, he tells Sherlock that he was shot in the shoulder. In an interview with *The Times*, *Sherlock's* showrunners Steven Moffat and Mark Gatiss confirmed that this was an allusion to the inconsistency of Watson's injury in the original (Billen 2013).

After the opening titles, we see the setting for the criminal part of the plot. We can see three short stories of people taking their lives with pills and a police press conference after that, where all these cases are considered to be unrelated suicides. In the series, the murder weapon is shown to the audience straight away, whereas it is discovered only after the second murder in the book. The motivation of the murder also changes, which influences some other plot details, for example, the word 'Rache'. In the original, it was written on the wall with blood; in the series, it was written on the floor by the victim before she died. The interpretations by Sherlock also differ. The original one deduces that it is a German word for 'revenge' and casts aside Lestrade's idea that it stands for a female's name Rachel. In the modern interpretation, Sherlock immediately casts aside the version regarding the German language and comes up to the conclusion that the victim was trying to write 'Rachel', which later turns out to be a password for her phone. This is an excellent example of how an indirect reference to the original can be made. One detail is interpreted in a diametrically opposite way, which justifies motivations. The original murderer seeks revenge; the modern murderer plays with death and works for money from a 'sponsor'.

Another clue that was interpreted in a very peculiar way is the wedding ring. In the original, it belonged to Lucy Ferrier, an American lady friend of the murderer. The murderer dropped it at the crime scene, and later Sherlock used it to lure out the killer. In the series, we also can see a ring, but it does not have significant relevance for untying the mystery plot. The more relevant clues were a pink suitcase and a phone which was nowhere to be found, and which Sherlock used to 'ring' the killer and lure him out. Or, more precisely, he used Watson's mobile phone and sent a message to the victim's phone, which is yet another reference to the

original Sherlock Holmes posting an advertisement about the ring in the newspaper, under Dr. Watson's name.

Now let us move to Sherlock himself. Both characters, the original and the modern, share the same general features – they are quick-witted, intelligent, a little bit arrogant, and have a tendency for addictive behaviour. The latter is only briefly demonstrated in the episode by the scene of the drug bust at 221B and by Sherlock's phrase: "It's a three-patch problem," a reference to "a three-pipe problem" (Doyle 1891: 36). However, there is one characteristic that distinguishes modern Sherlock from the original quite significantly. When Watson and Sherlock are driving to the crime scene, the famous consulting detective explains the logic behind his assumptions about John Watson's brother:

> **John:** How can you possibly know about the drinking?
> **Sherlock:** *Shot in the dark. Good one, though*. Power connection – tiny little scuff marks around the edge of it. Every night he goes to plug it in to charge, but his hands are shaking. You never see these marks on a sober man's phone, never see a drunk's without them.

Here we can see an example of abductive reasoning, something which the original Sherlock is quite often accused of[1]. Nevertheless, the original has never doubted the power of deduction, whereas modern Sherlock can sometimes admit that he is guessing.

Overall, we can imagine the modern Sherlock being sent back in time and successfully replacing the original one because their characters are quite similar, except for some minor details motivated by the mode of time, which places the main character in the 21st century.

The last character to be analysed here is the killer. The common features between the series and the original are his job occupation, his health, and the murder weapon. Both killers are cabmen with an aneurism, and both used pills to kill victims (except in the case of the second victim in the original, he was stabbed in self-defence). Nevertheless, the original murderer was driven by the revenge motive. He used two identical pills, poisoned and harmless, and did not know which one was deadly, relying on "justice upon the earth" (Doyle 1887: 131). In the series, we have a 'dead man walking' motivated by his desire to 'outlive' people and leave some assets to his children. He knows where the poisoned pill is, and he plays a wicked game with his victim. In the end, both killers die.

The character of the killer can be also used to illustrate the limitations posed by the new medium and modes. In the book, it takes five chapters to convey the killer's backstory and motivation. A one and a half hour episode cannot afford to spend so much time establishing the killer's identity. Therefore, it has to be revealed in the 10 minutes dialogue between Sherlock and the cabmen. Moreover, most of the information we get from a part of the dialogue, is where Sherlock is deducing the cabmen's background, and which lasts for approximately 3 minutes. It is hardly possible to tell the whole story of a person within such a short period of time; therefore, a lot of details have to be omitted. Nevertheless, the creators of the series successfully convey the most essential information about the killer's motivation.

Before we move towards the conclusion, let us consider a very peculiar feature of multimodality, which the series' authors created. They moved the series beyond the screen of the television. The websites *The Science of Deduction* and *John's blog* were created. Unfortunately, they are no longer in use today, but they were when the series was on air. The former did not have many articles, but the latter included all the cases described in the series, some of the cases not included in it, and posts from the times before Watson met Sherlock. Each case also had a comment section with comments written on behalf of the characters. There was a website with Molly Hooper's diary, but that is also no longer available today.

Another interaction with the audience happened via Twitter. The event called 'Sherlock Live' was conducted on 10 January 2017. The creators and showrunners of the series – Steven Moffat and Mark Gatiss – were live-tweeting details of a case written for this special on the BBC-one account. They were tweeting in the role of Sherlock, posting some bits of information, clues, and answering other users' tweets. The event happened five days before the premiere of the final episode. Unfortunately, it is hard to say whether this event can be considered a successful advertisement campaign since the final episode was watched by 5.9 million people in Britain, which is the lowest number of viewers throughout the whole history of the series (Jackson 2017).

Conclusion

To draw the conclusion, let us straighten up everything we managed to find out by analysing the original novel and the first episode of the modern series. The intersemiotic translation of Sherlock Holmes into the modern-day world led to omitting some of the original parts of the plot. Most of the tools used by the characters were modernised, and the characters themselves were changed to fit into the 21st century. Dr. Watson does not wear a moustache anymore, and Sherlock does not wear his famous hat, not until the second season at least, and not voluntarily. And it is not only the character's form that was changed; the content was changed too. Watson became more traumatised by his war experience and more captivated by the thrill of the 'battlefield'. Sherlock became blunter and more energetic. Even the killer's motivation has changed. The episode is threaded with intertextuality. It refers not only to its original counterpart but also to other Sherlock Holmes stories. This gives an excellent opportunity for the fans to become detectives themselves to find all the 'easter eggs'. The fact that some of the latter can be found not only in the episodes but also out in the vast spaces of the Internet brings the multimodality factor into the intersemiotic translation, and increases the audience's involvement.

Overall, the first episode of BBC's *Sherlock* is an excellent example of a translation that does not restrict itself to translating only the content. It transfers the function of the original text with the help of various references and allusions, at the same time, it changes the initial medium, encompassing different modalities, and expands the genre by adding elements, non-conventional to the original

detective story. The series shows that the process of intersemiotic translation is accompanied by a certain degree of novelty. Novelty in characters, narration, and distribution.

For the past century, Sherlock Holmes has had multiple faces and various interpretations in different languages. Nevertheless, one thing stays the same, he is still the genius welcomed by people all over the world. No matter the hat.

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Notes

1 The example of abductive reasoning by the original Sherlock can be found in the scene where Sherlock Holmes explains the logic behind the assumption that Dr. Watson was in Afghanistan. For further reading see Carson, David 2009: *The abduction of Sherlock Holmes.*

ACTIVACIONES SEMIÓTICAS PARA EL VIOLÍN ACOMPAÑANTE: Institucionalización de la inteligencia colectiva emergente en escenarios de educación informal

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Resumen: El violín, por su desarrollo técnico y organológico, históricamente ha sido categorizado como un instrumento melódico. En la actualidad, en prácticas musicales populares contemporáneas como el *blues*, *country*, *jazz, funk* y *rock*, es utilizado como instrumento rítmico y de acompañamiento a través de técnicas extendidas que permiten al intérprete la inclusión de nuevos timbres y colores. Estas prácticas, que comenzaron a expandirse aproximadamente a partir de la década de 1950, abrieron la posibilidad de concebir el violín como un instrumento armónico que demanda estrategias didácticas distintas a las que tradicionalmente se emplean en su enseñanza en los conservatorios. Las nuevas estrategias se socializan en escenarios de educación informal y conforman una inteligencia colectiva que sedimenta significados musicales específicos. Mediante la exploración de estos espacios de aprendizaje informal, y sustentados en una propuesta semiótica del aprendizaje musical, durante un programa de maestría se sistematizaron algunos conocimientos generados por la inteligencia colectiva en una guía didáctica para comprender el violín como instrumento de acompañamiento e implementarlo en un escenario educativo no formal. Se exponen resultados y reflexiones sobre el proceso.

Palabras clave: violín, chop, jazz, acompañamiento, sistema semiótico, educación informal, educación no formal, educación musical

Semiotic activations for the accompanying violin: Institutionalization of collective intelligence emerging from informal education scenarios

Abstract. The violin, due to its technical and organological development, has historically been categorized as a melodic instrument. Currently, in

contemporary popular musical practices such as blues, country, jazz, funk and rock, it is used as a rhythmic and accompaniment instrument through extended techniques that allow the performer to include new timbres and colors. These practices, which began to expand approximately from the 1950s, opened the possibility of conceiving the violin as a harmonic instrument that demands different teaching strategies from those traditionally used in conservatories. The new strategies are socialized in informal education scenarios and form a collective intelligence that settles specific musical meanings. Through the exploration of these informal learning spaces, and supported by a semiotic proposal of musical learning, during a master's program the authors systematized some knowledge generated by collective intelligence in a didactic guide to understand the violin as an accompaniment instrument and implement it in non-formal educational setting. Results and reflections on the process are presented.

Keywords: violin, chop, jazz, accompaniment, semiotics system, informal education, non-formal education, music education

Semiootilised aktiveerimised saateviiulil: kollektiivse intelligentsuse institutsionaliseerumine mitteformaalsete haridusstsenaariumite kaudu

Abstrakt. Viiulit on selle tehnilise ning organoloogilise arengu tõttu ajalooliselt liigitatud meloodiapilliks. Praeguse aja populaarmuusika praktikas, bluusis, kantris, džässis, funk ja rokkmuusikas kasutatakse seda rütmi- ja saatepillina koos lisatehnikatega, mis võimaldavad esinejal kaasata uusi tämbrivarjundeid. Need tehnikad, mis hakkasid levima umbkaudu 1950. aastatest, avasid võimaluse käsitleda viiulit kui harmooniapilli ja nõuavad uusi traditsioonilistest konservatooriumitest eristuvaid pedagoogilisi strateegiaid. Uued strateegiad sotsialiseeritakse informaalsetes haridusstsenaariumites ning moodustavad kollektiivse intelligentsuse, mis kinnistab spetsiifilised muusikalised tähendused. Toetudes muusikalise õppe semiootilisele käsitlusele ning uurides neid informaalseid õppekeskkondi süstematiseerisid autorid magistriprojekti jooksul osa kollektiivse intelligentsuse teadmistest didaktilisse juhisesse, et paremini mõista viiulit kui saatepilli ning kaasata see teadmine mitte-formaalsesse pedagoogilisse konteksti. Artikkel esitab selle protsessi tulemused ja reflektsiooni.

Märksõnad: viiul, chop, džäss, semiootiline süsteem, informaalne haridus, mitte-formaalne haridus, muusikaharidus

1. Inteligencia colectiva en escenarios de aprendizaje informal del violinista contemporáneo

La utilización del violín como instrumento de acompañamiento no ha sido una temática en el currículo formal de los programas de nivel superior en México. Salvo contadas excepciones, como la Universidad de Ciencias y Artes de Chiapas, que ofrece una licenciatura en música popular y jazz, y algunas academias privadas (Carbajal-Vaca 2021: 30), no se han integrado prácticas de jazz y géneros afines en los programas de licenciatura, además de que el violín

tampoco figura en la educación jazzística, a diferencia de otros países como Estados Unidos, Holanda y España, que sí han incursionado en este ámbito.

México cuenta con una rica tradición musical en la que el violín tiene un papel central. Sin traer aquí la discusión sobre si deben enunciarse como géneros o estilos (Mendoza-Halliday 2018), en expresiones como el *son*, el *huapango* y el *mariachi*, el violín juega un papel preponderante; no obstante, son pocas las opciones en el país para aprenderlos al abrigo institucional, ya que se consideran prácticas propias de la tradición oral, o bien, situadas en los límites de la oralidad y la escritura (Palacios 2018). Salvo algunas excepciones recientes, como la Escuela de Mariachi Ollin Yoliztli Garibaldi (Palacios, Ruiz y Payán 2021), históricamente, estas prácticas no han sido albergadas en contextos académicos. Vega (2010) sostiene que en un contexto globalizado como en el que vivimos actualmente, es difícil estudiar música tradicional, ya que se ha difuminado la línea entre lo tradicional y lo comercial; además, los músicos frecuentemente se encuentran en el dilema de mantener su tradición intacta o transformarla para vivir de sus conocimientos sobre la música tradicional. No utilizaremos el calificativo mexicana, ya que esta música es un híbrido conformado principalmente por rasgos diversos de músicas europeas, de pueblos originarios de América y de África; cada una de estas vertientes, a su vez, albergan expresiones multiculturales dependientes de otros mestizajes.

El interés de esta investigación se centra en las prácticas musicales demandadas por el campo laboral actual, influido por un mundo globalizado. Joe Deninzon (2012) señala que el panorama del violinista contemporáneo ha cambiado y ya no es suficiente la formación tradicional, por lo que ahora se tiene que involucrar en prácticas innovadoras que comprendan el uso de técnicas extendidas, creación de ensambles, el uso de tecnologías, entre otras estrategias. Dado que en los programas formales actuales no se atiende el desarrollo de habilidades para el violín de acompañamiento, los instrumentistas interesados buscan información en espacios de *educación informal*, que responden más rápido a problemáticas inmediatas y a corto plazo que la *educación formal* –institucionalizada– cuya evolución es lenta (Jenkins 2009). Entendemos la institucionalización de la educación, en el sentido semiótico searleano, como sistemas de reglas constitutivas (Searle 1969): musicar un género o un estilo, al igual que hablar una lengua, se realiza mediante actos de conducta intencional gobernados por sus reglas constitutivas.

La educación informal se distingue por carecer de sistematicidad –reglas constitutivas–; los sujetos se unen por afinidad a espacios en donde las prácticas son experimentales, a diferencia de la educación formal, que es conservadora (Rogers 2005) e institucionalizada. Actualmente los violinistas autodidactas amplían sus recursos en el ámbito del acompañamiento recurriendo a Internet, espacio donde la información tiende a estar dispersa por las redes y no abarca de forma integral elementos para el aprendizaje del violín de acompañamiento, ya que las propuestas suelen centrar su atención en

las técnicas extendidas, sin profundizar en aspectos armónicos o estilísticos que requieren de una sistematización para su aprendizaje.

No obstante, se entiende que este escenario de educación informal actual es el que ha creado una "inteligencia colectiva" (Jenkins 2009) que subsiste en la premisa de que nadie puede saberlo todo y todos podemos integrar una parte de nuestro conocimiento. El crecimiento de las redes sociales ha permitido que violinistas de todo el mundo formen comunidades de intercambio de información sobre nuevas técnicas que están marcando tendencias: "La suma del conocimiento individual supera ampliamente la de los expertos" (Piscitelli 2009: 143). En los foros virtuales comparten tutoriales con sus hallazgos para desarrollar habilidades –especialmente en *Facebook,* porque permite la interacción– y se generan grupos en donde los usuarios muestran sus propios videos[1], hecho que facilita su difusión. Otras redes, como *Instagram* y *Tik-Tok*, permiten compartir videos o imágenes de forma casi instantánea y de corta duración, lo que origina la viralidad del contenido, para después redireccionar a los interesados a videotutoriales más largos en *Youtube*.[2] Este tránsito de las prácticas informales a nuevos espacios donde los conocimientos comienzan a organizarse, van configurando ámbitos de *educación no formal*; es decir, ambientes en los que la información comienza a sistematizarse e institucionalizarse. En opinión de Rogers (2005), en países en desarrollo este tipo de prácticas no formales se ha introducido también en espacios de educación formal.

Consideramos que la investigación de la que deriva este artículo es un ejemplo de esta situación porque se sistematizaron estrategias informales para el violín de acompañamiento en un taller en el que estudiantes de una licenciatura en música de corte tradicional se involucraron en el aprendizaje de géneros de música popular que no pertenecen al currículo formal del programa; sin embargo, vieron en este aprendizaje una oportunidad para ampliar sus opciones de integración al campo laboral. De este modo, la investigación se identifica con la visión general de la educación del Nuevo Grupo de Londres (Cazden 1996), que propone asegurar al individuo el beneficio de aprender en formas que le permitan participar profundamente en la vida pública comunitaria, creativa y económica.

2. Instrucciones focalizadas para la movilización semiótica figural-espacial

Si bien hay información suficiente en Internet, así como bibliografía, que permiten al violinista desarrollarse como instrumentista rítmico y de acompañamiento de forma autodidacta en ámbitos de educación informal, se consideró que disponer de una guía ordenada, gradual y sistematizada, en el ámbito de la educación no formal, mediaría el desarrollo de diferentes habilidades para lograr prácticas propias del jazz y géneros afines, tales como

la lectura de cifrados, estilos y técnicas de acompañamiento, los cuales están ausentes en la formación del violinista tradicional, porque la comprensión del instrumento tiende a ser melódica y no armónica. Incluso, cuando se trata de ejecutar armonías que tienen el objetivo de cambiar el color o la textura, éstas están supeditadas a la melodía (Tiscareño-Talavera 2020), hecho que se constata en los métodos tradicionales de violín como es el caso de estudios o caprichos de Kreutzer (2006). El estudio número 13, por ejemplo, se desenvuelve a través de arpegios, no obstante, bien pudiera resolverse a través de la transposición de figuras armónicas en forma de bloques en el diapasón. Se requería pues, diseñar estrategias didácticas que propiciarían un cambio en el pensamiento del violinista, de la comprensión melódica hacia la armónica. Diseñamos un *tratamiento* que activaría "representaciones figural-espaciales generadas por el sentido de la vista y el tacto" (Carbajal-Vaca 2014: 186), sobre el diapasón del violín, de manera similar a las que ocurren en el aprendizaje de la guitarra mediante las *tablaturas*[3].

Al inicio de la investigación, la revisión bibliográfica arrojó pocos resultados sobre el violín como instrumento acompañante. Se identificaron en particular el libro de *Strumm Bowing Method* (Silverman 2018) y *Pluggin in* (Deninzone 2012). Ambos autores se centran en el desarrollo del violinista desde un aspecto rítmico, aunque el segundo incluye también improvisación melódica y, superficialmente, aborda diferentes estilos. En el libro *Jazz Violín Studies* (Abell 1983) se proponen ejercicios de acompañamiento con técnicas tradicionales a través de la ejecución de dobles cuerdas, con las que se logran acompañamientos para el *blues* y otras estructuras jazzísticas; sin embargo, se reconoce que el centro de atención en estas propuestas se dirige hacia la improvisación melódica.

Durante los dos años en los que se desarrolló la investigación (2019-2021) se observó el crecimiento de comunidades de educación informal interesadas en el violín como instrumento de acompañamiento. Varios artistas comenzaron a compartir su trabajo en estos años. En particular destaca *The Chop Notation Project* (2019b), en donde Cassey Driessen y Oriol Saña se dieron a la tarea de crear una notación gráfica que representa los diferentes ataques de *chop*[4] que los mismos autores han usado y se han dedicado a desarrollar. Los signos gráficos utilizados representan la posición y el movimiento del arco respecto del diapasón y del puente, así como el ataque vertical que deriva en un sonido en particular en cuanto a la intensidad; es decir, se recurre a representaciones gráficas para sonoridades distintas a las de la notación musical tradicional.

A partir de la creación de *The Chop Notation Project*, Driessen se encargó de una intensa difusión de su documento, el cual está en formato pdf para su descarga gratuita[5]. Además, creó un video explicativo en donde ejecuta las diferentes variaciones titulado *The Chop Notation Glossary- Explained & Demonstrated by Casey Driessen* (2019a). Es interesante ver cómo, después del lanzamiento del proyecto, se crearon diferentes grupos en las redes

sociales con usuarios que compartían ejercicios o piezas musicales en donde resolvían el ritmo y el acompañamiento con el violín usando las diferentes técnicas de *chop*; a su vez, comenzaron a usar la notación propuesta en el documento de Driessen para explicar el ejercicio. Un caso en particular es el video *World of chop n°3_level 3* (Maillet 2020), en donde el autor resuelve el acompañamiento de la canción de Bob Marley, *No wonam no cry*, mediante la implementación del *triple chop*[6].

Este último ejemplo es uno entre varios videos en los que el artista usa diferentes técnicas de *chop* y las explica a través de la notación de Driessen; evidencia que la música popular es un área de interés de los violinistas, aunque no posea un lugar en los contextos académicos formales. Reconocemos que el contexto de las nuevas formas de acompañamiento responde a un movimiento dialéctico en el que las prácticas populares crean y alimentan una estructura base sobre la que crece el interés. Esta dinámica posibilita la socialización de experiencias musicales que se comprende si se asume una identidad subjetiva y colectiva (Frith 1996).

3. Estatus y posibilidades rítmicas del violín en el género de jazz

Ari Poutiainen (2019), violinista de jazz contemporáneo, compositor e investigador finlandés, menciona que, a pesar de que el violín ha estado presente en la historia del jazz desde sus inicios, su rol dentro del género es ambiguo; salvo casos muy particulares como el *jazz manouche* o *jazz gitano*, no goza de una posición privilegiada como lo hacen otros instrumentos comúnmente usados en el jazz, como el saxofón. Así pues, Poutiainen considera que el violín se ha valorado como un instrumento insuficientemente rítmico, aunado a los problemas tecnológicos como el sonido que enfrentó el violín con respecto a otros instrumentos. De igual manera, menciona que la complejidad rítmica, armónica y melódica parece ser particularmente retadora para los violinistas. Poutiainen refiere a la musicóloga Susanne Gläß como una investigadora que arroja luz al problema de la presencia del violín en jazz moderno al señalar que el cambio de estatus del violín en el jazz se debe a que es un claro representante de la música europea y del jazz, especialmente en la era del *Bebop*[7], momento en que se esforzó por constituirse como una expresión artística propiamente afroamericana.

Pese a las prenociones sobre el instrumento, la investigación se ciñó a la visión de Tracy Silverman (2018), quien asegura que los cuerdistas son capaces de ser ejecutantes rítmicos muy efectivos; sin embargo, la educación formal pareciera ser un obstáculo y rara vez se les entrena en *rock*, jazz, *folk, bluegrass*, y otros estilos donde el *groove*[8] es constante. Asumimos que para que el violinista pudiera ser capaz de acompañar, debería tener un entendimiento de los géneros y de los elementos con los que podría 'jugar' –

como lo sugieren los términos *play* y *spielen,* en inglés y alemán respectivamente–, para generar una base sólida desde el punto de vista improvisativo. El instrumentista habría de desarrollar habilidades técnicas para la manipulación del instrumento e impregnarse de los géneros a trabajar, lo que derivaría en un músico más versátil.

Se optó por un enfoque jazzístico porque en el jazz el acompañante funge como un proveedor de acordes –reglas constitutivas– que sirven de base al improvisador y de conector con el resto de la banda. El acompañante refleja la armonía particular de una pieza e improvisa los ritmos (White 2012), lo que no significa crear de cero (Capistrán-Gracia 2016). Para la improvisación en cualquier género es necesario conocer las convenciones musicales básicas que la sostienen (Bauer 2020) y, sobre ellas, extender el conocimiento musical y crecer en habilidades técnicas. De este modo, el acompañante improvisará a partir del estilo, el compás o la propia armonía.

Dado que el violín, a diferencia de algunos instrumentos como la guitarra y la mandolina, no tiene trastes, pensar los acordes en el diapasón desde una perspectiva gráfica se vuelve una tarea compleja. Pese a ello, diseñamos una propuesta con la intención de modificar el proceso semiótico del violinista, de un enfoque lingüístico tradicional –centrado en el solfeo melódico–, hacia un enfoque visual –centrado en la posición de los dedos sobre el diapasón–. Se reconoció que era necesario propiciar un cambio en el pensamiento del violinista respecto de su instrumento en dos aspectos principales: las técnicas de arco y la distribución armónica del diapasón, por lo que se articuló una comprensión del aprendizaje musical que permitió modelar un proceso didáctico para el aprendizaje del violín como instrumento armónico, por lo que se elaboraron *instrucciones focalizadas* en la activación semiótica figural-espacial.

Con base en algunos de los ejercicios contenidos en la revisión bibliográfica y videográfica de espacios informales, mencionados anteriormente, se diseñó la guía didáctica que se sometió a prueba en un taller que se desarrolló durante un semestre con cinco estudiantes de violín y viola universitarios de diferentes niveles, mediante el método de investigación-acción. Se diagnosticó una problemática, se realizó una intervención para el cambio y se evaluaron resultados para continuar la reflexión sobre la situación (Hernández-Sampieri et al. 2014).

4. Activación semiótica en la didáctica musical del violín de acompañamiento

Con base en las teorías semióticas de Charles Sanders Peirce y Raymond Duval, Carbajal-Vaca elaboró un modelo de análisis semiótico en el que, de acuerdo con la tricotomía de Peirce –primeridad, segundidad y terceridad– estudió las conversiones semióticas posibles durante el aprendizaje de la música hasta

lograr la activación coordinada de los diversos registros semióticos que conducen a una *noesis musical compleja*. El concepto de *noesis* es entendido como un "acto de pensamiento" (Duval 2017: 69) y como una intelección creativa –abductiva– que involucra funciones de *objetivación* y *tratamiento* para activar los distintos signos que conforman el *sistema semiótico musical*. "Concebimos este proceso como la concatenación de actos de significación (semiosis) creciente y cambiante en el que se activan paulatina e interactivamente, registros de representación de naturaleza diversa" (Carbajal-Vaca 2014: 87).

> un músico competente es aquel que realiza el acto de musicar a partir de la activación de por lo menos [...] ocho sistemas semióticos, mediante los cuales comprenderá las emisiones melódicas, armónicas, polifónicas, tímbricas, rítmicas y estético-expresivas del sistema musical de su cultura. (Carbajal-Vaca 2014: 177)

Aplicando esta teoría semiótica del aprendizaje, la activación, coordinación y conversión de registros ocurre de la siguiente manera en el violín de acompañamiento:

1. *Sistema semiótico cinético*: movimiento del arco de manera horizontal para lograr el chasquido característico del *chop* que, desde la perspectiva tradicional, no es un movimiento deseable.
2. *Sistema semiótico gráfico*: marcas en la partitura necesarias para representar sonidos percutivos. El *chop* usa nuevas formas de notación que representan el movimiento de arco: flechas que indican la dirección del arco, el ritmo con el que se tocará el *chop,* como es el caso del *triple chop* para obtener ritmos de tresillos. Aquí existe una íntima relación del registro semiótico cinético y el acústico, ya que se debe obtener un sonido específico mediante un movimiento de arco particular.
3. *Sistema semiótico lingüístico*: asocia palabras con actos musicales. Una práctica común es utilizar la activación silábica de la palabra *Mé-xi-co* para comprender la sonoridad rítmica –sistema semiótico acústico– del tresillo. En el caso del movimiento del arco en el violín, se usan palabras monosílabas en inglés, para indicar la dirección del arco, *up / down*, en relación con el movimiento de la mano –sistema semiótico cinético–. Esta práctica en particular ha sido desarrollada por Tracy Silverman.
4. *Sistema semiótico numérico*: permite etiquetar los dedos con un número, contar tiempos, comprender compases, hacer vueltas de blues.
5. *Sistema semiótico acústico*: activado mediante la movilización de todos los sistemas semióticos anteriores para responder a imágenes sonoras específicas.
6. *Sistema semiótico estructural*: organiza las características formales de los estilos o géneros para reconocerlos. Así, una vuelta de blues se

forma por 12 compases y una progresión armónica ii-V-I, constituye un *standard* de jazz.

7. *Sistema semiótico figural-espacial*: es en el que se centró la guía didáctica. Consiste en focalizar la atención en la distribución de los dedos, las formas y figuras derivadas de un acorde o una estructura melódica que, a su vez, pueden ser representadas gráficamente en tablaturas o imágenes de la mano y los dedos. La idea es que el violinista pueda relacionar una figura con el sonido que se genera al colocar la mano de cierta manera sobre el diapasón.
8. *Sistema semiótico estético-expresivo*: su objetivo es la comprensión de elementos estilísticos que distinguen las diferentes músicas, como el *swing* o el *shuffle* en el jazz, además de representar, en coordinación con otros sistemas semióticos, la calidad acústica apreciada como musicalidad.

Siguiendo esta propuesta en el aprendizaje del violín de acompañamiento, asumimos que una estrategia didáctica, conformada por *instrucciones focalizadas* en el sistema semiótico figural-espacial, propiciaría la activación interdependiente de los ocho registros semióticos. De este modo, la comprensión armónica del diapasón del violín permitiría al instrumentista la conformación de un glosario de acordes, a manera de reglas constitutivas del sistema, para posicionar los dedos de manera efectiva.

La activación del registro semiótico figural-espacial en el violín genera representaciones gráficas de la distribución de los dedos sobre el diapasón para replicar, desplazar y transponer la figura o forma a lo largo y ancho del diapasón, de manera similar a lo que se hace en una guitarra. La propuesta de entender el violín a través del registro semiótico figural-espacial, requiere de un sistema de representación que pueda coordinar la cualidad sonora deseada con una figura o forma; es decir, activar la representación visual, replicarla y, a la vez, generar sentido desde las representaciones acústica y háptica. Por tanto, el violinista debe ser capaz de encontrar la relación entre la disposición de los dedos en el violín dentro de un acorde, al mismo tiempo que reconoce un sentido visual en lo que ha sido representado gráficamente en una tablatura. Asumimos que, visualizar figuras sobre el diapasón, economiza el pensamiento melódico, el cual se apoya normalmente en la evocación del nombre de las notas –activación semiótica lingüística– como suele ser la práctica habitual del solfeo en la tradición académica de los conservatorios. Desde la perspectiva de Hall (1997) se entiende que, mediante estas activaciones semióticas, el violinista dispondrá de un nuevo sistema de representación que le permitirá poner en relación objetos, conceptos y signos para darle significado al mundo y para construir un conjunto de correspondencias entre el mapa conceptual disponible y los nuevos signos, es decir, encontrar diferentes maneras de organizar, agrupar y clasificar distintos signos para establecer relaciones complejas.

5. La guía didáctica para el acompañamiento en música de jazz y géneros afines

En la *Guía didáctica para el acompañamiento en música de jazz y géneros afines* (Tiscareño-Talavera 2020) se constató que la activación del registro semiótico *figural-espacial* promovió la comprensión armónica del violín al seguir instrucciones focalizadas hasta lograr el acto de acompañar. Mediante la nueva sistematización se atendieron dos problemas principales: a) la técnica del arco para la ejecución rítmica fluida, estable y precisa; b), la activación figural-espacial de la mano izquierda, que posibilitó la comprensión armónica del diapasón, simultáneamente con la lectura del cifrado, práctica habitual para guitarristas, pero no para violinistas. Para la mano derecha, se incluyeron también técnicas tradicionales como el *pizzicato*[9] o el *ricochet*[10], que se pueden utilizar para el *comping*[11].

La guía se organizó en cuatro secciones: la primera se dedicó a entender el diapasón de forma armónica; la segunda a las técnicas de producción de sonido con la mano derecha; la tercera a la coordinación de las dos primeras secciones; y, la cuarta, a piezas en donde se pone en práctica lo aprendido en las tres primeras anteriores. Siguiendo de manera progresiva el nivel de complejidad armónica, se trabajaron cuatro géneros fundamentales: el *blues*[12], el *funk, bossa nova –o música brasileña–* y el *jazz*.

Las técnicas de producción del sonido se fueron integrando paulatinamente. Se comenzó por la técnica de *quasi chitarra*, que significa rasguear las cuerdas como una guitarra, lo que, además de permitir sostener el violín de una forma más cómoda, presupone la posibilidad de coordinar la representación gráfica de las tablaturas con la representación figural-espacial sobre el instrumento.

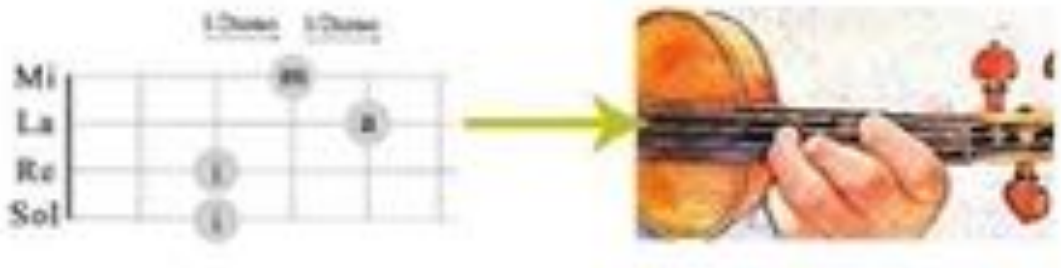

Figura 1. Tablatura del acorde y su posicionamiento en el diapasón del violín. (e.g. adaptada de Tiscareño-Talavera 2020: 107)

Las tablaturas como representación visual para el aprendizaje musical ha sido un recurso muy común en la guitarra y también ha sido utilizado en diversos métodos de violín, como el método de Suzuki (2007). Ari Poutiainen (2019), por ejemplo, propuso la utilización de la digitación esquemática –*schematic fingering*–, la cual consiste en aprender esquemas prototípicos que pueden ir

desde escalas hasta *licks*[13], en donde se evitan cuerdas al aire y se pone especial atención entre las distancias de los dedos. Estos prototipos melódicos pueden ser graficados por medio de tablaturas. En la figura 1 se muestra la propuesta de Poutiainen implementada en la guía didáctica para la comprensión de acordes. La meta fue entender la distribución de las notas cordales en el diapasón a través de una tablatura, para guiar la posición de los dedos. La representación lograda debe partir de un área común, por lo que, la relación tono y medio tono que equivale a dedos separados o juntos –representación figural espacial–, se mantiene, aunque exista un cambio de cuerda. Incluso si hay más de una segunda melódica de distancia entre las notas, el violinista pondrá atención en la relación de los dedos como pegados o separados igual que si fuera un tono o medio tono. De este modo, si se busca tocar la misma cualidad del acorde, pero desde una raíz diferente, se usa la misma forma, pero comenzando de la nota deseada, por ejemplo, si se desea tocar un *si bemol dominante*, se replica la forma medio tono adelante, posicionando el dedo índice en la nota de *si bemol*, y la distribución de los demás dedos permanecen igual.

Durante el taller, una vez aprendida la estructura del *blues* se integró un ritmo de *funk* con técnicas de arco como el *ghosting*[14] y *chop*. Conforme los participantes dominaban estas técnicas, se fue involucrando en ritmos propios de la música brasileña, que guardan una similitud con el uso de notas de dieciseisavo, pero que son diferentes en cuanto la acentuación. La asimilación de aspectos rítmicos, estilísticos y técnicos de los primeros tres géneros es lo que permitió que el violinista fuera competente para acompañar *standards*[15] de jazz, que pueden ser ejecutados en cualquier estilo y a través de la técnica que el violinista desee. Tras navegar por las características rítmicas y estilísticas del *blues*, *funk*, *bossa nova* y otros géneros afines, como el *swing*, los alumnos lograron precisión rítmica y estilística, por lo que fueron capaces de acompañar diferentes *standars* de *jazz*, según el estilo de su preferencia.

Se reconoce que la sistematización de la guía transita por unidades que van atendiendo diferentes aspectos estilísticos y técnicos para el acompañamiento en el violín que requieren la activación y coordinación de distintos registros semióticos; sin embargo, durante el taller se dio mayor atención a la activación semiótica figural-espacial, centrada en la representación visual de la armonía sobre el diapasón del violín porque una de las principales características del jazz yace en la armonía. La carga cultural de este género es tan fuerte que incluso ha sido considerada la música clásica de la cultura afroamericana del siglo XX (Delannoy 2012), por lo que en la guía didáctica se presume que el violinista debe apropiarse de las características esenciales del estilo y establecer relaciones entre los acordes y lo que desea ejecutar mediante la expansión de sus conocimientos previos, incluso distanciarse de significados culturales de la formación tradicional. Tal es el caso de la ejecución del *chop,* que requiere una técnica que rompe ciertos paradigmas en cuanto a la relación arco-sonido. Esta técnica requiere que las

cerdas del arco se encuentren apuntando hacia el lado contrario del puente como se muestra en la figura 2, lo que genera un signo acústico áspero no deseable en la música académica de la formación tradicional. Para el jazz, en cambio, este tipo de acompañamiento y sonoridad 'rasposa' son deseadas por el efecto percusivo resultante. La mano derecha requiere la activación precisa del registro semiótico cinético coordinado con la representación acústica del género.

Figura 2. Posición del arco para el *chop* (Tiscareño-Talavera 2020: 128).

Hasta aquí hemos entendido la representación de los acordes desde un punto de vista estático, pero también se pueden entender los movimientos armónicos internos a través de figuraciones prototípicas de estructuras cordales, como puede ser el movimiento del bajo por cuartas dentro de una progresión de *blues* o bien una progresión armónica ii-V-I –sistema semiótico estructural–.

Además de la posición del arco, la producción sonora requiere de un movimiento perpendicular para dejar caer el arco contra las cuerdas y obtener la sonoridad de chasquido característica del *chop*. Además, puede ser alternado con alturas, en donde el arco hace movimientos tradicionales para frotar las cuerdas y producir sonido. Para resolver los movimientos de arco se integró la propuesta de Tracy Silverman (2018) y el arco 3D (ver figura 3), que consiste en la práctica rítmica del violín con movimientos del arco en más de dos direcciones, a diferencia de las prácticas tradicionales que se mueven en dos direcciones, o bien, si lo vemos desde un plano cartesiano, siempre se mueven sobre un solo eje.

A través de la teoría semiótica entendemos que Silverman integra un sistema de representaciones a través de la coordinación de los registros semióticos lingüístico y cinético, trabajando el arco de forma tradicional para la integración del *chop* en la que, por medio de la técnica de *ghosting*, mantiene un movimiento arriba y abajo para después acentuar las notas que habrán de resaltarse mientras pronuncia verbalmente la dirección del arco, lo que permite al violinista crear una representación auditiva –registro semiótico acústico–.

Esta técnica permite desarrollar una precisión rítmica bastante estable en ritmos con subdivisiones complejas.

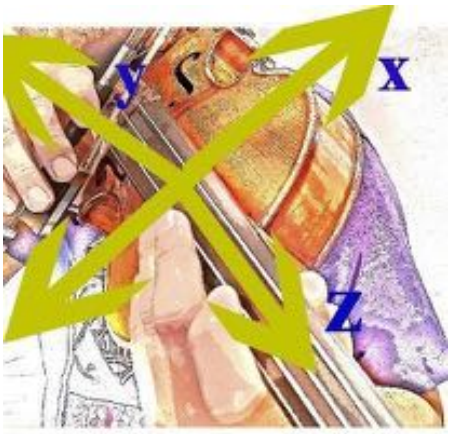

Figura 3. Representación de los ejes del Arco 3D sobre el violin. (Tiscareño-Talavera, marzo 2022)

Silverman no explora todas las posibilidades del *chop,* a diferencia de Driessen (2019a, 2019b) que propone el uso de *scrappes* o raspados, que responde al movimiento sobre el eje de la z, lo que resulta en un sonido parecido al de ruido blanco o bien como las escobetillas haciendo un movimiento circular sobre la tarola. Driessen, como se mencionó al principio del presente escrito, se dio a la tarea de crear una notación para los diferentes tipos de *chop* que propone. Recurre a representaciones gráficas específicas de los movimientos del *chop* –activación cinética–, tomando en cuenta su dirección e intensidad. (Ver figuras 4 y 5)

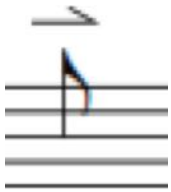

Figura 4. Scrape, hacia el lado, lejos del cuerpo del ejecutante. (Driessen 2019: 18)

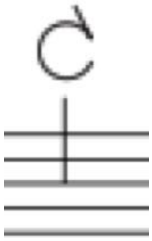

Figura 5. Circular, movimiento en dirección de las manecillas del reloj. (ibid)

Cassey Driessen ha logrado crear una comunidad que utiliza un lenguaje común; ofreció a la comunidad de violinistas una serie de nombres y notaciones que se relacionan de manera específica con la práctica del acompañamiento y el *chop*. Aunque ya existía el concepto *chop,* Driessen generó un sistema de representación que posibilita la comunicación entre los miembros de la comunidad violinística y permite expresarse y compartir conocimientos sobre una práctica que, al disponer de representaciones lingüísticas (conceptuales) y gráficas (partitura) precisas, pronostica su permanencia y desarrollo al hacer posible la integración de más participantes activos en el colectivo.

Conclusiones

Esta investigación evidenció que el aprendizaje de géneros populares requiere el desarrollo de habilidades y técnicas específicas, tal y como ocurre en los procesos de aprendizaje musical formal. Para socializar músicas innovadoras en contextos formales es necesario disponer de estrategias didácticas validadas; de ahí la necesidad de sistematizar –institucionalizar, en sentido searleano– las prácticas de los espacios informales y sustentarlas en teorías del aprendizaje. Dada la rapidez con la que ocurren las modificaciones en la música popular, su socialización ocurre en ámbitos informales. Ante este escenario, la educación no formal emerge como un ámbito propicio para el análisis y socialización de prácticas informales mediante la sistematización.

Al igual que la música académica, cada uno de los géneros populares conforma un sistema que funciona de acuerdo con reglas constitutivas para la ejecución precisa de signos acústicos valorados culturalmente como características esenciales que posibilitan su reconocimiento. La socialización de significados musicales puede ocurrir en ámbitos de aprendizaje informal, no formal y formal; sin embargo, dada la ausencia de algunos géneros y estilos en la educación formal, su socialización ocurre, principalmente, en ámbitos de educación informal no institucionalizada.

El violinista contemporáneo, en particular en México, ante la necesidad de aprender nuevas técnicas para interpretar géneros y estilos que le permitan insertarse en contextos laborales, busca información en Internet, en grupos de redes sociales como *Facebook,* videoblogs, entre otros espacios digitales insertos en el ámbito de educación informal, donde los conocimientos emergen de manera espontánea, conformando una inteligencia colectiva.

La guía didáctica de Tiscareño Talavera recabó información de comunidades informales en el acompañamiento del jazz que fue sistematizada y puesta en relación con una teoría semiótica del aprendizaje existente. Se analizaron técnicas y tendencias actuales, cuya práctica puede comprenderse mediante el reconocimiento de los diferentes registros semióticos que son activados para su ejecución.

Se confirmó que el registro semiótico figural-espacial es un recurso didáctico adecuado para la comprensión armónica del violín. Después de la implementación del taller, se realizó una estancia profesional en Brasil en la Universidad Federal de Rio Grande del Sur, en donde Tiscareño-Talavera tuvo la posibilidad de conocer violinistas de alto nivel, como el doctor Ronner Urbina[16] quien, además de su formación académica formal, tiene conocimiento sobre la música popular. El diálogo con el investigador constató que el uso de figuras es una propuesta viable. Él mismo, en su práctica en música popular, acostumbra acompañar y reconoce los acordes y sus cualidades por medio de la posición de los dedos y las formas que se generan sobre el diapasón del violín –activación semiótica figural-espacial–, conocimiento adquirido en el ámbito informal.

Actualmente se trabaja en una nueva exploración del violín y su comprensión semiótica. Se reconoció que la representación figural-espacial está estrechamente vinculada a una representación visual que es compleja para el violinista por la carencia de trastes. El posicionamiento de los dedos, por tanto, activa otros referentes adicionales aún no explorados. Hemos conjeturado que la representación figural-espacial se coordina con representaciones hápticas para las que no existen representaciones gráficas, lo que añadiría un registro semiótico más a los ocho delineados en la caracterización del sistema semiótico musical propuesto por Carbajal-Vaca.

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Notes

1 Ver: https://www.facebook.com/groups/worldofchop

2 Violín Versátil. E. Bortoloti, Puebla, México: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kFUd-Wr7ilc.

3 [...] sistema que consiste en la representación gráfica de las cuerdas de la guitarra y las marcas de las posiciones de los dedos. Las tablaturas tienen su origen en el Renacimiento cuando el laúd se convirtió en uno de los instrumentos predilectos de la época. Dada la complejidad de la notación, se creó una notación práctica para los aficionados que no representaba sonidos sino posiciones de los dedos sobre los instrumentos. (Carbajal-Vaca 2014: 191).

4 Técnica extendida utilizada en el acompañamiento del violín, en la que se produce un chasquido percutido. (Ver Tiscareño-Talavera 2021: 18).

5 *The Chop Notation Project.* https://www.caseydriessen.com/chop-notation-project.

6 Ver: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S5_Pl8QX6rc

7 Bebop es un término usado para describir un estilo específico que fue desarrollado en los años 1940's, frecuentemente contiene melodías complejas basadas en estructuras armónicas expandidas e improvisaciones técnicas (Davis 2012: 18).

8 Proceso musical que identifica un impulso vital. Intensidad rítmica adecuada a un estilo o género musical. El sentido del pulso de un músico es subjetivo, no objetivo, de ahí que los músicos interpreten y realicen el paso del tiempo y marquen la presencia del pulso de formas ligeramente diferentes (Whittall 2015).

9 Es una de las técnicas tradicionales más explotados que además puede realizarse en modalidad *quasi chitarra* o *pizzicato* de mano izquierda, variaciones que resultan en una cualidad tímbrica parecida a la de la guitarra o ukulele.

10 Técnica que consiste en rebotar el arco. Esta manera de ejecución permite realizar ritmos ágiles complejos en una sola dirección de arco. Combinándola con cambios de dirección del arco, es posible ejecutar subdivisiones binarias y ternarias.

11 Término utilizado en el jazz y géneros afines para referir el acto de acompañar.

12 El *blues,* por tener la estructura más simple, permite trabajar con tres áreas tonales mediante tres acordes que suelen ser de la misma cualidad. Un blues dominante se puede construir con tres acordes de dominante que representan cada uno un área tonal. En tonalidad de La mayor serían el primer grado A7 o La dominante; la segunda área tonal sería el cuarto grado, igualmente dominante, es decir, D7 o Re dominante; la tercera área corresponde a E7 o Mi dominante. Una vez aprendida la estructura se pueden cambiar los acordes a modo menor, o bien, es posible la introducir acordes nuevos para crear cadencias a las áreas tonales a través de estructuras arquetípicas del jazz como el ii-V-I.

13 Idea melódica que se puede replicar en diferentes piezas musicales con estructuras armónicas similares.

14 También conocidas como notas fantasmas; consiste en una técnica en la que dichas notas suenan de modo casi superficial, contrastadas por notas que se acentúan.

15 Pieza musical altamente socializada y por tanto, reconocida en el contexto del jazz.

16 Urbina: https://ronnerurbina.com/about.

NETFLIX AND *NARCO*-POP CULTURE

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Abstract. The aim of this paper is to analyse how, *Narcos: Mexico,* is remediating the past, re-creating and shaping cultural memory, posing as an unofficial history teacher for young audiences, and secondly, to show how the myth creation process described by Roland Barthes (1991[1976]), applies to the personification of the drug trafficker as a Bad Bunny figure. This myth is used as a marketing effort in order to monetise original stories, a by-product of our hypermodern capitalistic society.

Keywords: Bad Bunny, cultural memory, hypermodernity, narcoculture, myth, mediation, remediation

Netflix ja narko-popkultuur

Abstrakt. Selle artikli eesmärgiks on analüüsida, kuidas film „Narcos: Mexico“ esitab minevikku uues vormis (remediating), taasloob ja kujundab kultuurimälu mõjudes nooremale sihtgrupile mitteametliku ajalooõpetajana. Teiseks eesmärgiks on näidata, kuidas Ronald Barthes'i (1991[1976]) kirjeldatud müüdiloomeprotsess kehtib narkokaubitseja kujutamisel Bad Bunny figuurina. Seda müüti kasutatakse kui turundusvõtet, et teenida kasumit originaallugude levitamise pealt, mis on ühtlasi hüpermodernse kapitalistliku ühiskonna kõrvalsaadus.

Märksõnad: Bad Bunny, kultuurimälu, hüpermodernsus, narkokultuur, müüt, vahendamine, taasvahendamine

Netflix y la Narcocultura Pop

Resumen. El objetivo de este trabajo es analizar cómo Narcos: México, está remediando el pasado, recreando y moldeando la memoria cultural, haciéndose pasar por un profesor de historia no oficial para el público joven, y en segundo lugar, mostrar cómo el proceso de creación de mitos descrito por Roland Barthes (1991[1976]), se aplica a la personificación del

narcotraficante como figura de Bad Bunny. Este mito se utiliza como un esfuerzo de marketing para monetizar historias originales, un subproducto de nuestra sociedad capitalista hipermoderna.

Palabras clave: Bad Bunny, memoria cultural, hipermodernidad, narcocultura, mito, mediación, remediación

Introduction

In recent years, subscription content platforms have taken an almost indispensable place in the lives of many people worldwide. More importantly, these platforms are creators and replicators of cultural products — or cultural texts as we will see later — which are part of today's pop culture[1]. Data on the global subscription video on demand (SVOD)[2] market shows that revenue more than tripled between 2016 and 2020. Further rapid growth is predicted to continue in the future (Fig. 1). The most popular platform worldwide in recent years has been Netflix, and from 2013 to 2021, it maintained its year-over-year subscription growth (Fig. 2).

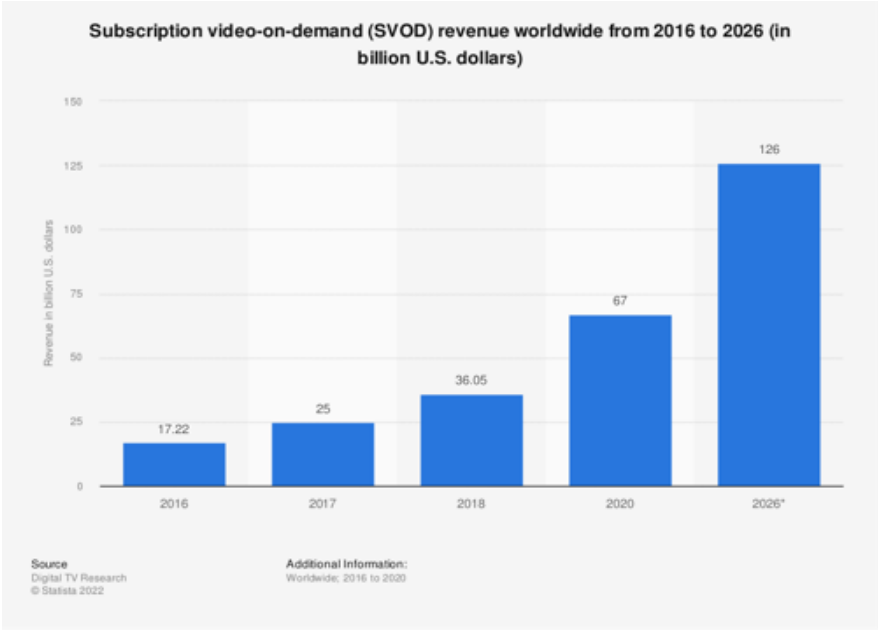

Fig. 1. Subscription video-on-demand (SVOD) revenue worldwide from 2016 to 2026 (Statista 2022a)

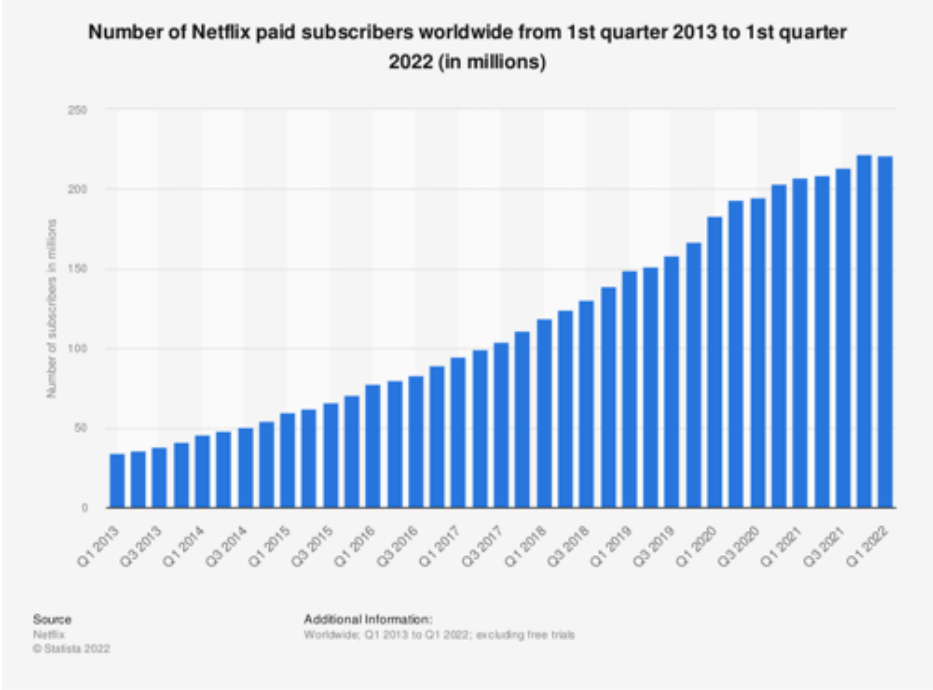

Fig. 2. Number of Netflix paid subscribers worldwide from 3rd quarter 2011 to 1st quarter 2022. (Statista 2022b)

One of the — relatively speaking — most recent changes within Netflix has been the production of original content in different countries. This content has managed to transcend borders and be streamed worldwide. This phenomenon can be seen with productions like *Dark* (Germany), *Money Heist* (Spain), *The Squid Game* (South Korea), and *Narcos: Mexico,* which has become one of the most-watched original Mexican pieces on the platform. Thanks to this type of productions, people from other countries can get a little closer to other cultures and societies. For example, those who do not live in Mexico, nor are Mexican, can watch *Narcos: Mexico*, and approach the social phenomenon of drug trafficking in the country through entertainment. Therefore, the meaning they give to the content will be different from someone who has grown up in the country and interacts with this every day.

Additionally, to talk about a phenomenon as complex as drug trafficking, we have to understand that Mexico is a country full of contradictions and contrasts. Where you can find one of the richest men in the world living in its capital, while at the same time there are people living in extreme poverty. It is true that this is not a characteristic exclusive to Mexico. Yet, its geographical location — connecting North with Central and South America, has placed the country in a position where these contrasts are strongly appreciated. The country is largely known as violent, which is due to many factors, but most of them related to drug cartels and the social dynamics produced around these criminal activities. There is a narco environment, we can even talk about a 'narcoculture'. Regarding this term, América Becerra Romero (2018) maintains:

> a social phenomenon that exists in different Latin American countries, especially Colombia and Mexico, although its development has been different within each nation due to its own socio-cultural features and the way in which drug trafficking has intervened in them. It has had a strong presence in Mexico since the 1970s, with the increase and diversification of the production of films, music, television series and documentaries related to drug use and trafficking, but also due to the media coverage that had the lifestyle of drug traffickers, their language, consumption, clothing, accessories, among other aspects. (Becerra Romero 2018: 2)

The foregoing places the phenomenon geographically and relates it to artistic expressions or cultural products. However, how can we define it, in a way that is relevant to what we will analyse in this paper. Anajilda Mondaca (2012) in her Doctoral dissertation, *Narcocorridos, city and daily life: spaces of expression of drug culture in Culiacan, Sinaloa, Mexico,* defines narcoculture as:

> a cultural process that incorporates a broad symbology, a set of visions of the world under certain rules and norms of behavior, insofar as they are understood values that surround this activity and are shared by broad sectors of society, beyond whether or not they are involved in the business of illegal drug trafficking. (Mondaca 2012: 66)

Going back to the documentary research carried out by Becerra Romero (2018), she concludes that 'narcoculture' has three elements that are used most frequently to define it:

> 1. As *a set of symbolic elements* that have meanings both for those who produce and spread them, and for those who consume and appropriate them.
> 2. *As a generator of life expectancies* [...] The symbolic elements contained in it create social representations and imaginaries about drug trafficking, which come to configure a world of life with its own styles, values and behavior patterns, and seduce a large number of people by turning into desires that range from the consumption and appropriation of symbolic content, to the incorporation into drug trafficking activities.
> 3. *As a mechanism for legitimizing drug trafficking*. [...] *narcoculture* constitutes the mechanism through which it is incorporated into the daily life of society, so that people get used to it and end up considering it as another economic activity, which allows different social groups to get ahead. (Becerra Romero 2018: 9-11)

While the focus of this paper is not the social and political issues of the country, all of these factors contribute to creating the arena in which Netflix content was created and decoded. As well as we can see with Becerra Romero's (2018) research, 'narcoculture' goes beyond drug trafficking, it is a result of cultural dynamics that contains social and symbolic elements. And as such, in it we see endless meaning making processes.

The aim of this paper is to analyse how *Narcos: Mexico* is remediating the past, re-creating and shaping cultural memory, posing as an unofficial history teacher for young audiences, and secondly how the myth creation process described by Roland Barthes (1991), applies to personification of the drug trafficker as a Bad Bunny figure. This myth is used as a marketing effort

in order to monetise with original stories, a by-product of our hypermodern, capitalistic society.

1. Cultural memory and mediality: Made of violent and painful events

Whenever we think about memory, we tend to do it on a personal (individual) level, if we can recall our actions or even thoughts. We may also think about our personal memories, those flashbacks that take us to our past. Thus, when we refer to memory, it is necessary to mention the remembering act, as memory cannot be defined without that. Besides, personal memory cannot be analysed in isolation. Culture is constantly shaping an individual's memories, knowledge, and values. Therefore, it makes sense that we can also share memories as 'cultural memory'. This chapter will be focused on the definition of 'cultural memory' and its relation to media. Firstly, this examines why there is cultural memory and how it works, making special emphasis on the work of the Tartu-Moscow School (TMS) scholars; giving this study a semiotic perspective. Secondly, this sketches out the relation between 'cultural memory and mediality in order to delimit the topic of interest.

To understand 'cultural memory', one should start with the concept of culture. For Juri Lotman, 'text' was the basic unit of culture. Marek Tamm gives an overview of Lotman's understanding of culture (Tamm 2015: 130-131) saying that it includes not only a certain combination of semiotic systems (languages) but also the sum of all historically existent messages (texts). Thus, central to Lotman's cultural theory is the notion of culture as a text or a sum of texts: "The semiotic universe may be regarded as the totality of individual texts and isolated languages as they relate to each other." (Lotman 2005: 208). The text is often seen only as a written message yet, according to TMS scholars, it can be created with different sign systems. It is not limited to words or natural languages.

Since the text is the basic unit of culture and, as mentioned above, one of its functions is related to memory, it sometimes seems difficult to draw a line between culture and cultural memory. Also, to have a memory is not the same as being part of the cultural memory. Memory becomes cultural when it is shared by the community, that is, when it is collective and mediated through shared texts. More importantly, cultural memory is not a static selective archive; it is a continuous process that goes on through time and space.

The view on culture as memory underlies the semiotic theory of Tartu-Moscow School, as is evident from *Theses on the Semiotic Study of Cultures* (Lotman et. al. 1998[1973]). Culture is the mechanism that stores information about society:

> If we regard the collective as a more complexly organized individual, culture may be understood by analogy with the individual mechanism of memory, as a certain collective mechanism for the storage and processing of information. The semiotic structure of culture and the semiotic structure of memory are functionally uniform phenomena situated on different levels. (Lotman et. al. 1998: 68)

The textuality of cultural memory brings about the question of the role of various media in cultural memory. According to Ann Rigney (2004), cultural memory is a process of communication through media. On this, Astrid Erll argues that: "Cultural memory is constituted by a host of different media, operating within various symbolic systems: religious texts, historical painting, historiography, monuments [...] each of these media has its specific way of remembering and will leave its trace on the memory" (Erll 2008: 389).

A good part of our cultural memory in Mexico is made up of violent events related to drug trafficking, which can be traced back to the 1980s. However, going back to the third season of *Narcos: Mexico*, it is set in the 1990s, in Mexico. I will focus on episode 4; *GDL*, which is the acronym for the city of Guadalajara, located on the west side of the country, it is one of the most populated cities. On May 24, 1993, at the city's international airport, a shootout took place, or as we know it thanks to the media, 'a crossfire' between two cartels; the one from Tijuana (*The Arellano Félix brothers*) and the one from Sinaloa (*El Chapo Guzmán / Güero Palma*), and because of this, Cardinal Juan Jesús Posadas Ocampo and his driver were assassinated at the scene.

The image of the dead cardinal in his car was circulated by the media, including international media, and it was impossible to believe that a cardinal, in a highly Catholic country, had been assassinated by drug traffickers. The official narrative was that he had been mistaken for *El Chapo Guzmán* and that is why the hit men hired by the Tijuana cartel blasted him. And this same narrative is replicated in the Netflix series.

As stated above, cultural memory is made by cultural texts; it is dynamic and relies on the role of media as a meaning creator allowing dynamism in the process of shaping cultural memory to create meaning. On top of that, it is also about how the past will be remembered; its process is based on reconstruction. Thus, the past is reconstructed by a third actor who is turning the experience or the information about the event into a point of reference not only for his contemporaries but also to those born after them, e.g.: "metaphor for the fashioning of narratives about the past when those with direct experience of events die off. Sites of memory inevitably become sites of second-order memory" (Winter 2008: 62). Then these places or sites of memory are, according to Brockmeier, "where people remember the memories of others and in this way re-appropriate a particular tradition" (Brockmeier 2010: 12). In addition, one event can generate a discourse about itself and be represented through various media and, of course, there are many narratives coexisting at the same time, which is why concepts like remediation and resemiotization are

relevant for understanding how cultural memory is created and rooted in society.

In the same way Lotman and Boris Uspensky (1978: 215) explain, "[...] text is not reality but material for its reconstruction", we can understand that fragments of reality make it into each text. Thus, these texts do not only mediate reality, but through the process of mediation, they shape the way reality is remembered. Mediation is a way to interact with reality, as Denis McQuail explains:

> [Mediation] it refers to the relaying of second-hand (or third party) versions of events and conditions which we cannot directly observe ourselves. Secondly, it refers to the efforts of other actors and institutions in society to contact us for their own purposes. This applies to politicians and governments, advertisers [...] it refers to the indifferent way in which we form our perceptions of groups of cultures to which we do not belong. (McQuail 2010[1983]: 203)

Hence, media can be seen as an instrument that helps humans to connect themselves with external objects or subjects. Also, it can be a carrier of several discourses in society. All of this is part of the process of the modelling of reality.

This is also why, Peeter Torop argues that studies in semiotics of culture lead to the semiotics of mediation that "is based on comparative analysis of mediation processes, on typology of forms of mediation and on the subsequent complementary analysis of culture" (Torop 2012: 286). He argues that there is an implicit and explicit mediation and that studying the correlation of these forms is the essence of the semiotics of mediation:

> For the essence of mediation stems from the different levels of conventionality that are created by the metalanguages, textual collections, discourses and media in the process of communication. Semiotics of media begins with semiotic mediation or with the conventionality of words in the signification of a given world, and ends with the culture of mediation where one and the same cultural language or one and the same text operates as a means of dialogue with oneself, as a means of communication with others, as part of a textual system or discourse, or as a transmedial phenomenon. (Torop 2012: 294)

Moreover, according to Rigney, memory sites are the result of a "selection process that has privileged some "figures of memory" above others" (Rigney 2008: 345). Besides, the acts of remembrance take place in different media and genres. That is why, for Rigney, "it is only through the mediation of cultural practices that figures of memory can acquire shape, meaning, and high profile within particular communities" (Ibid, 345).

With the above in mind, the Cardinal's murder has been mediated and remedied throughout the history of Mexico. And it has become a *lieux de mémoire* for Mexicans. Its symbolism has transcended generations. Although we know that in recent years, the Church as an institution has been questioned and has lost the faith of many. However, in those years, it was highly respected among Mexicans, the cardinal is a representative of God on earth, how was it possible that some criminals had killed him? A shooting in broad daylight at

one of the country's most important airports? This was just the beginning of a series of violent events that we Mexicans have witnessed through the media and now through pop culture.

Pierre Nora's concept of *lieux de mémoire* proposes that they "are places, indeed, in the three senses of the word, symbolic and functional, but simultaneously in different degrees. Even a place of purely material appearance, as a deposit of archives, is only a place of memory if the imagination confers on it a symbolic aura." (Nora 2008: 33). Thus, as previously stated in this chapter, cultural memory depends on certain materialisation, a media, or as Nora argues, a *lieu de mémoire* to stay alive. In addition, he considers the relation between place and time as one of the most important features that distinguishes them: "[...] the most fundamental purpose of the *lieu de mémoire* is to stop time, to block the work of forgetting, to establish a state of things, to immortalize death, to materialize the immaterial [...] in order to capture a maximum amount of meaning in the fewest of signs" (Ibid, 34).

The interaction between media and cultural memory was taken to a different level by Laura Basu (2008) when she provides a reconceptualisation of Nora's term *lieux de mémoire*, in which media is no longer seen as a symptom of memory loss, but rather as resources that can provide a certain order to memory. Basu emphasises that her interest is not to contradict Nora's work, but "to examine in more detail how exactly a memory site may form and evolve over time, and in particular how it may produce, organize and transmit meaning, in terms of the mediatization that are so essential to its existence" (Basu 2008: 140). She proposes the concept of memory dispositif to analyse more complex mediations, arguing: "The term "dispositif", often translated as "apparatus", usually refers to a constellation of heterogeneous elements within a system" (Ibid, 141). The latter makes sense if one wants to analyse not a medium in isolation but rather as different kinds of media interacting within a process.

Basu (Ibid, 141) claims that thinking about a memory site as a dispositif allows us to move beyond looking at individual texts or media as they relate to cultural memory and to see a site of memory as being made up of a conglomeration of heterogeneous media texts, the specific relationships between which determining the nature and functions of the memory site at a given time.

Likewise, Rigney talks about written texts as 'sites of memory' and monuments, as they "have a fixed character which allows them to play a role in recalling some person or event of yore and in bearing witness to them" (Rigney 2004: 383). Yet different from other kinds of memorials, texts are not located in a particular site, "hence they may be recycled among various groups of readers living in different parts of the globe and at different historical moments. In this sense, texts are 'portable' monuments, which can be carried over into new situations" (Ibid, 383). According to Rigney, when the literary practice is located in the cultural memory framework, it becomes apparent that

"the complex processes involved in the circulation of stories and the evolution of collective remembrance: both the convergence of remembrance on particular sites and the gradual erosion of those sites" (Rigney 2008: 352).

In this way, cultural memory must be seen as something 'alive' and in constant motion and not only as a static archive. On this, Rigney (2005: 25) suggests that cultural memory must be seen "as something dynamic, as a result of recursive acts of remembrance, rather than as something like an unchanging and pre-given inheritance". Even further, Erll (2011: 11) proposes, "as the incessant wandering of carriers, media, contents, forms, and practices of memory, their continual 'travels' and ongoing transformations through time and space, across social, linguistic and political borders." For her, memory travels as it has the mobility, "to be kept in motion, in order to 'stay alive', to have an impact both on individual minds and social formations" (Ibid, 12).

This 'living' part of memory arises thanks to the journeys of the texts, from one medium to another, from one context to another, the ones more durable than others, are those that become, in Rigney's (2004) terms, 'portable monuments'. The same thing happened with the death of the Cardinal when it was broadcast by many newscasts and now, taken up by Netflix to add that touch of truth, that only the context of the time could give to this series. As a result, the way in which the discourse is created cannot be seen only as a structure of meaning; statements grouped to communicate something. The discourse must be seen also as "a practice as material affordance" (Iedema 2003: 50). For that reason, the material expression allows for realising the social, cultural, and historical structures, as well as the investments and circumstances in which we live.

Consequently, *Narcos: Mexico* is not only a process of mediation, but also that of remediation, created by several chains of semiotic production. To continue, it is necessary to make some notes about the remediation. Firstly, it must be specified, as it was already mentioned, that for this study remediation does not focus on the implications of changing technologies from one semiotic artifact into another, but rather on how these material representations (texts) are chained to another and how the meaning making process can be affected from one text to another. This process goes beyond acts of repetition, as there is always a selection of certain abstracts or elements from one text to another, creating a new text, and meanings. Thus, there has to exist a selective reconstruction of the discourse of the event. After all, the whole process of cultural memory is based on selection.

Narcos: Mexico is telling a story, the texts not only talked about the life story of the drug lords, but also mentioned several social problems in the country, mostly the ones closely linked to drug trafficking as a sociocultural and political phenomenon. Thus, the narrative of these texts placed the case into a violent social context. Besides, these texts are multimodal; the resources for the meaning making process are more diverse than those used by the written press. The audience is able to hear the voices and see the gestures

thanks to the actors, while also being able to see some of the places where the events took place.

Hence, the role of remediation in the creation of the cultural memory of *Narcos: Mexico* is to connect the processes of mediation, in order to create a chain of semiotic activities. In other words, there are semiotic means interacting simultaneously during the mediatisation of the murder of Cardinal Posadas, and this interaction happens thanks to the diverse material activity and the collection of texts about the case. As Rigney (2008) points out, how these materials become themselves objects of recollection. They are connected in different levels, internally through footage and photographs, which are placed from one context to another; then, the next level is the relation between the texts (a collection of the previous ones), how they refer to each other, to create new texts; following by the implicit remediation, in which, as a result of the previous chains of remediation, other texts emerged, trying to commemorate what happened to the Cardinal, to demand justice. All of them create the discourse as a structure of meaning and as a practice with material affordance, of the event shaping the cultural memory. As the memory functions as a dispositif of heterogeneous texts, that have a dialogue between them. For example, a source text can be a 'stabilizer', according to Rigney's typology, yet for other texts they can be an 'object of recollection', or a 'catalyst', depending on the moment and context of the remediation and of course the contents of the source text.

Our cultural memory has travelled from newscasts, newspapers to Netflix shows. The new generations investigate the events that occurred in the 90s as a result of watching *Narcos: Mexico*. Netflix has become a history teacher for younger audiences. Moreover, it is in charge of circulating and keeping texts alive, such as the death of the Cardinal, and thus being part of the process of cultural memory of Mexicans.

2. The myth of the Narco Jr. by Netflix

The first thing that comes to our minds when someone mentions 'mythologies' is ancient Greece, or one of the first civilizations that inhabited the world. However, thanks to Roland Barthes' proposal (1991) we know today that we have created different myths that give meaning to our daily lives, and not only that, it is about modelling our reality with the resources we have at hand. Not to mention, that the creation of myths is one more example of how the meaning making process is continuous and endless. In this chapter we will analyse how Barthes' theory (1991) can be applied to the character of 'Kitty' Páez, played by Bad Bunny in the third season of *Narcos: México,* in particular during chapter 5: *Boots on the ground,* In other words, how the myth of the *Narco Jr*[3]. is created in the Netflix series using a key figure in pop culture, Bad Bunny.

Bad Bunny happens to be a Puerto Rican singer, producer and actor. He has been Spotify's most-streamed artist for two years in a row, and his *El Último Tour Del Mundo* was the best-selling post-pandemic tour. He is one of the most influential artists in the world, particularly among the young, and was part of the cast of *Narcos: Mexico*, personifying *Narco Jr.* Arturo 'Kitty' Páez:

> [He] is not a child of the criminal underworld, but rather the product of a stable and supportive middle-class family. As such, his songs do not represent chronicles, but rather fantasies of the underclass. This is very common within many popular music genres, in which exaggeration reigns among young people seeking to represent themselves as heroic protagonists of what is in reality a banal and stifling day-to-day existence [...] Some say Bad Bunny's lyrics are misogynistic and violent. Undoubtedly his songs often fall into some of the more trite scripts of popular music: sex, drugs, money, fame. But they are not actual chronicles of violence; instead they use metaphors of violence to talk about other usual themes of popular music: love, indifference, betrayal and spite (Bonilla 2018).

The choice of casting Bad Bunny is not innocent, clearly there are marketing and media interests behind this decision. Choosing him guarantees many views, and both Bad Bunny and 'Kitty' Páez can be seen as representations of the myth of the popular singer and drug trafficker; becoming one. Paraphrasing Barthes (1991), in myth we find the tridimensional pattern: the signifier, the signified and the sign. However, myth is a peculiar system, in that it is constructed from a semiological chain which existed before: it is a second-order semiological system. A system in which a sign — the associative total of a concept and an image — in the first system becomes a mere signifier in the second. The materials of mythical speech — the language itself, photography, painting, posters, rituals, objects, etc., — are reduced to a pure signifying function as soon as they are caught by the myth. Which wants to see in them only a sum of signs, a global sign.

As explained by Barthes (1991), in myth there are two semiological systems, one of which is staggered in relation to the other: a linguistic system, which is a signification. He, also says, that we cannot say too often that semiology can have its unity only at the level of forms, not contents; because its field is limited, with only one operation: reading or deciphering. Which he calls language-object, and this is where myth gains the order to build its own system. However, myth itself has a second language, a metalanguage, in which one speaks about the first. Consequently, a semiotician will only need to know its total term, or global sign, as this term lends itself to myth.

The Narco Jr. played by a popular urban/pop singer, is a good example of a mythical concept: the two individuals becoming one. Both powerful and wealthy, well-known, admired[4] by some, hated by others. In short, each of them, is the sum of diverse signs. As a consequence, together they create new ones, even, a global sign — the character in the series, Kitty Páez and Bad Bunny — the urban drug trafficker. And, finally, a new signification, through which the receivers of the myth, in this case the public, assimilate the hegemonic discourse, that prevails in our society:

> On the plane of language, that is, as the final term of the first system, I shall call the signifier: *meaning* (*my name is lion, a Negro is giving the French salute*); on the plane of myth, I shall call it: *form*. In the case of the signified, no ambiguity is possible: we shall retain the name *concept*. The third term is the correlation of the first two: in the linguistic system, it is the *sign*; but it is not possible to use this word again without ambiguity, since in myth (and this is the chief peculiarity of the latter), the signifier is already formed by the *signs* of the language. I shall call the third term of myth the *signification*. This word is here all the better justified since myth has in fact a double function: it points out and it notifies, it makes us understand something and it imposes it on us. (Barthes 1991: 115)

Bad Bunny is not known for being an actor, people recognise him as a singer. He has an extensive fan base, which sees him playing a 'thug — a man who is violent and a criminal' linked to drug trafficking, and this activity is idealised by his fans. He transfers the meaning of himself, what he represents, to the character, and that is how the audience that follows him and watches the show interprets it. Having an artist like Bad Bunny adds a kind of coolness to the character or at least a kind of update to the figure of the drug trafficker in particular, attacking the macho culture closely linked to drug lords — powerful and violent surrounded by many women as their partners:

> The word *macho* translates to male, but the stereotype of how a man should act is continually discussed within Latin countries. If a man defies the norms of how he should act, he is seen as an outsider and is typically shunned by his community. Seeing a Latino artist like Bad Bunny is rare within the community, which is why his image makes such an impact. He isn't afraid to be vulnerable within his lyrics, embracing femininity and discussing topics that are taboo within Latin countries: LGBTQ+ and feminist rights. (Gómez, 2022)

Although, it is part of a fiction, the line with reality is blurred, because it is inspired by a person who existed and committed crimes. For someone who watches *Narcos: Mexico* and doesn't know who 'Kitty' Páez is, but does know who Bad Bunny is, the latter will weigh more than the former when creating meaning about the character. The foregoing perpetuates, as we have already mentioned, the idealisation of drug traffickers/lords in pop culture.

Conclusions

To conclude, Netflix uses this myth — Bad Bunny as a Narco Jr. — as a marketing effort to attract young audiences and continue to monetise with original stories. At the end of the day, Netflix is a business that is sustained by user subscriptions, as well as views of its content.

Then again, Netflix markets products in and for a hypermodern capitalist society, one of the cruellest forms of capitalism, as Gilles Lipovetsky (2006[2004]) proposes we went from postmodernity to a hypermodernity.

Where hyper-consumerism is king, or anything that has the prefix hyper and regulates our actions:

> Hypercapitalism, hyperclass, hyperpower, hyperterrorism, hyperindividualism, hypermarket, hypertext - is there anything that isn't 'hyper'? Is there anything now that does not reveal a modernity raised to the nth power? The climate of epilogue is being followed by the awareness of a headlong rush forwards, of unbridled modernization comprised of galloping commercialization, economic deregulation, and technical and scientific developments being unleashed with effects that are heavy with threats as well as promises. (Lipovetsky 2006: 55)

Lipovetsky (2006) continues to establish the impact of these developments and mercantile relations on society, and on individuals, highlighting the contradictions with which we live:

> The frenzied escalation of 'more, always more' has now infiltrated every sphere of collective life. Even individual behaviour is caught up in the machinery of excess: witness the mania for consumption, the practice of drug-taking in athletics, the vogue for extreme sports, the phenomenon of serial killers, bulimia and anorexia, obesity, compulsions and addictions. Two opposite trends can be discerned. On the one hand, more than ever, individuals are taking care of their bodies, are obsessed by health and hygiene, and obey medical guide-lines. On the other hand, individual pathologies are proliferating, together with the consumption characteristic of anomie, and anarchic behaviour. (Lipovetsky 2006: 58)

Based on Lipovetsky's ideas (2006), in the hypermodern age we live in a culture that promotes the pursuit of fleeting pleasures. A cult for the present:

> A whole hedonistic and psychological culture is born that encourages the immediate satisfaction of needs, stimulates the urgency of pleasures, flatters the expansion of oneself, puts the paradise of well-being, comfort and leisure on a pedestal. Consume with impatience, travel, have fun, give up nothing: after the policies of the radiant future, consumption has come as the promise of a euphoric present. (Lipovetsky 2006: 64)

The fixation on the ephemeral has guided us towards mass consumption in which everything has an expiration date and we are in a constant collective search for what must come next:

> At the center of the reorganization of the regime of social time is the passage from productive capitalism to an economy of consumption and mass communication, the replacement of a rigorous and disciplinary society by a «fashion-society», restructured from top to bottom by techniques of the ephemeral, renewal and permanent seduction. From industrial objects to free time, from sports to games, from advertising to information, from hygiene to education, from beauty to food, the accelerated expiration of products appears everywhere [...] (Lipovetsky 2006: 63)

For Lipovetsky's (2006) proposal we could add Guy Debord's (1994[1967]) who claims that we live in a 'society of the spectacle', which appears at once as society itself, as a part of society, and as a means of unification. As a part of society, it is that sector where all attention and all consciousness converges, it

is the locus of illusion and false consciousness: "The spectacle is not a collection of image; rather, it is a social relationship between people that is mediated by images" (Debord 1994: 2).

> In all its specific manifestations – news or propaganda, advertising or the actual consumption of entertainment – the spectacle epitomizes the prevailing model of social life. It is the omnipresent celebration of a choice already made in the sphere of production, and the consummate result of that choice. In form as in content the spectacle serves as total justification for the conditions and aims of the existing system. It further ensures the permanent presence of that justification, for it governs almost all time spent outside the production process itself [...] The language of the spectacle is composed of signs of the dominant organization of production — signs which are at the same time the ultimate end-products of that organization. (Debord 1994: 2-3)

Furthermore, Bauman (2007) states that a society of consumers stands for a peculiar set of existential conditions under which the probability is high that most men and women will embrace the consumerist rather than any other culture. In other words, the consumers will stand for the kind of society that promotes, encourages, or enforces the choice of a consumerist lifestyle and life strategy, and they will dislike all alternative cultural options; following the precepts, is the approved choice and a condition of membership.

It has been shown that, over the creation of mythical concepts, such as 'the cool drug trafficker', we can see the goals intended to be achieved in a consumer society: to have money, power, be known by many, have beautiful women at your disposal. In other words, own what you can in a short time, everything that can give you pleasure. Through the idealisation of drug traffickers as cool, and connecting with young Latin audiences through a pop ideal. Netflix has contributed to the notion of the drug trafficker as a celebrity, and it has made the history and cultural memory of Mexico a source of entertainment worldwide.

This is largely because Netflix produces hypermodern products, which are part of a contradictory era. Where people look to have a good time while watching a show about criminals, death, and drug trafficking. We turn on Netflix to blank our minds. We look for an escape. Something that does not make us think or reflect, something that entertains us. Perhaps fictional content with sparks of drama for instance, but we do this without thinking that what we call fiction is the daily reality for many.

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Notes

1 The concept can designate culture as it stems from the experience of people in everyday life, as well as the commercially successful products of mass communication, etc. (Hall 2002 [1981])

2 Also termed the video streaming industry, refers to services that charge users a monthly subscription fee for streaming of content housed on their platforms. e.g., Netflix and Amazon Prime Video, offer unlimited access to their content libraries for a monthly subscription fee. Movies and TV series can be streamed to various supported connected devices. The SVoD market does not include ad-supported services, pay-per-view offerings or services that require a pay-TV subscription (e.g., HBO Go) (Statista, 2021).

3 Young men from wealthy families in Tijuana who were linked to the Arellano Félix cartel. They trafficked drugs to the United States and were hit men for the cartel.

4 Although this is not the case with 'Kitty' Páez, it has been noted how people dress their children as drug lords on Halloween. Although for them it is a joke, in some sense it is also a reflection of admiration for those figures of power in Latin America. For further reading:
Frisk, Adam 2015. Child dressed in Pablo Escobar Halloween costume spurs backlash, *Global News*. Retrieved from: https://globalnews.ca/news/2306856/child-dressed-in-pablo-escobar-halloween-costume-spurs-backlash/, 29.05.22.

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POSTEMOTIONALISM, MCDONALDIZATION, AND TRANSMEDIAL WORLDS as commodifying mechanisms in fan fiction communities

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Abstract. The intent of this article is to understand the commodification of leisure and labour within fan fiction writing communities. To accomplish this, I attempt a theoretical synthesis of postemotionalism, McDonaldization, convergence culture, transmedial worlds theory, and literature on fan fiction writers and identity. Commodification and rationalisation through the internet have been studied quite heavily, Terranova (2013) and Fuch (2014) for instance have taken more Marxian/Marxist approaches, and Ritzer (2019), and Jenkins (2006) have demonstrated how implosions, or convergences, create exploitative media and mechanisms. However, the increasing rationalisation of the social world through online space calls for a closer look at the formalising and implosive processes within the Internet itself, and I attempt this through reviewing rationalising mechanisms noted in the literature on fan fiction. The article concludes that the emotions and community created by transmedial world fan fiction writers attract and hold writers to said community by blurring leisure and labour. The writers' continuous interactions through their leisure time activities of socialising and fan fiction writing create said community, while simultaneously offer uncompensated support and labour for the expansion and maintenance of transmedial worlds and media culture products.

Key Words: formalisation, rationalisation, Ritzer, Jenkins, Meštrović, convergence culture

Postemotsionaalsus, mcdonaldiseerumine ja transmeedialised maailmad kui kaubastamise mehhanismid fännikirjanduse kogukondades

Abstrakt. Käesoleva artikli eesmärk on mõista jõudeaja ning töö kaubastamist fännikirjanduse kogukondades. Selleks proovin sünteesida postemotsionalismi, mcdonaldiseerumise, konvergentsikultuuri, transmediaalsete maailmate teooriat ning fännikirjanduse loojate ja

identiteedi käsitlusi. Kaubastumist ning ratsionalisatsiooni internetis on uuritud laialdaselt. Terranova (2013) ja Fuch (2014) on näiteks võtnud marksiliku või marksistliku lähenemise, samas kui Ritzer (2019) ja Jenkins (2006) on näidanud kuidas kokkulangemised või konvergentsid loovad ekspluateerivaid meediaid ja mehhanisme. Siiski nõuab sotsiaalse maailma kasvav ratsionaliseerimine lähemat uurimust formaliseerimis- ja kokkulangemisprotsessidesse internetis endas ning seda üritan teha andes ülevaate ratsionaliseerivatest mehhanismidest, mida on käsitletud fännikirjanduse uurimustes. Artikkel järeldab, et transmediaalsete maailmade fännikirjanduse autorite loodud emotsioonid ning kogukond on ligitõmbav seeläbi, et hägustab jõude- ning tööaja piire. Kirjanike pidev läbikäimine jõudeaja tegevuste kaudu nagu sotsialiseerimine ning fännikirjanduse tootmine loob kogukonda, samas pakkudes tasustamata toestust ja tööjõudu transmediaalsete maailmade ning meediakultuuri toodete laiendamiseks ja hoolduseks.

Märksõnad: mcdonaldiseerumine, postemotsionalism, transmediaalsus, fännikirjandus, kaubastumine, konvergentsikultuur

Postemocionalismo, McDonaldización y mundos transmediales como mecanismos como mecanismos de mercantilización en las comunidades de fans

Resumen. El objetivo de este artículo es comprender la mercantilización del ocio y el trabajo en las comunidades de escritores de fanfiction. Para lograrlo, presento una síntesis teórica del postemocionalismo, la McDonaldización, la cultura de la convergencia, la teoría de los mundos transmediales y la literatura sobre los escritores de fanfiction y la identidad. La mercantilización y la racionalización a través de Internet se han estudiado bastante, Terranova (2013) y Fuch (2014), por ejemplo, han adoptado enfoques más marxianos/marxistas, y Ritzer (2019), y Jenkins (2006) han demostrado cómo las implosiones, o convergencias, crean medios y mecanismos de explotación. Sin embargo, la creciente racionalización del mundo social a través del espacio online requiere una mirada más cercana a los procesos de formalización e implosión dentro de la propia Internet, y lo abordo a través de la revisión de los mecanismos de racionalización señalados en la literatura sobre la ficción de los fans. El artículo concluye que las emociones y la comunidad creadas por los escritores de fanfiction del mundo transmedial atraen y retienen a los escritores a dicha comunidad al difuminar el ocio y el trabajo. Las continuas interacciones de los escritores a través de sus actividades de ocio de socialización y escritura de fan fiction crean dicha comunidad, al tiempo que ofrecen apoyo y trabajo no compensado para la expansión y el mantenimiento de los mundos transmediales y los productos de la cultura mediática.

Palabras clave: McDonaldización, postemocionalismo, transmedial, fan fiction, commodificación, cultura de convergencia.

Introduction

One of George Ritzer's most recent editions on McDonaldization, *The McDonaldization of Society: Into the Digital Age* (2019), presents an interesting and much needed headway into understanding the continuation of

rationalisation within the increasing digitisation and the transference of structures, processes, and interactions into online space. This is not only important for understanding how formal rationalisation and the digital world are related, but how these processes relate to commodification. A number of theorists and scholars have taken similar interests. Tiziana Terranova's (2013) work on internet labour for instance, examines how technological innovations and constructions on the Internet have been accomplished through considerable volunteer and unpaid labour. Christian Fuch (2014) has contextualised labour, and its influence on the Internet within Marxist labour theory. Moreover, Abigail De Kosnik (2013; 2009: 118, 119-120) comes to a similar conclusion stating that fan fiction is largely unpaid labour, but she also notes that fan fiction is coming to a 'sugarhill moment' in which those outside of the communities will begin to commodify fan fiction before the actually members. The purpose of this article is to create further theoretical understandings of how formal rationalisation is being used through online means to extract labour from individuals. Specifically, I intend this article to demonstrate how the increasing prevalence of rationalised online space and the blurring of the distinctions between labour and leisure have allowed for mechanisms to commodify fan fiction.

I will accomplish this by drawing from two general perspectives, the first pertains to sociology, which is largely concerned with theoretical innovations on Max Weber's work on rationalisation. This will mainly pertain to postemotionalism and McDonaldization, as best seen in the works of Stjepan Meštrović and Ritzer. McDonaldization's focus on technological and organisational innovations and convergences that emphasis convenience, paired with postemotionalism's focus on emotional manipulation and control for the benefits of media or cultural industries, will consequently offer a valuable understanding of how emotions, organisation, and technology are connected to social structures and control social interaction. The second perspective will draw from semiotic studies in convergence culture and transmedial worlds theory, as exhibited by the works of Henry Jenkins, Lisbeth Klastrup, and Tosca Susana. These perspectives allow an understanding of how cultural processes and systems engage and control, individuals, and groups, as well as how cultural products are constructed by the media and wider society. This will consequently contextualise McDonaldization and postemotionalism by adding further understandings of the media and its consumers. I will also draw from scholarship on group identities and fan fiction writing to demonstrate the structures, benefits, processes, and pitfalls associated with these writers and their communities. Ultimately, I aim to use these perspectives to illustrate and elucidate upon my thesis, that online formal rationalised spaces incorporate an implosion of leisure and labour to commodify the works of fan fiction writers. I will begin this article with an outlining of the theoretical perspectives I have presented above, before turning to scholarship on fan fiction and identity, then continue to a discussion

intended to clarify the relationship between online spaces, rationalisation, transmedial worlds, labour, leisure, and implosions. I intend this section to further my theoretical synthesis by offering preliminary perspectives on the structures and mechanisms that facilitate the commodification of fan fiction writers.

1. McDonaldization

Turning to Ritzer, along with Jean Baudrillard's work, he utilises Max Weber, Karl Marx, and Guy Debord in his analysis of what he terms the new cathedrals of consumption. These entail means of consumption that are highly rationalised systems utilising constant reenchantment to lure individuals to consume. Weber (1978 [1968]: 85; 2005 [1930]: 18, 70-74) terms formal rationality, based on observations of increasing pushes and implementations of efficiency, within social systems. He noticed that social and economic structures continuously indulge these systems causing them to continuously rationalise. Formal rationalised systems therefore complicate and limit individual abilities and interaction within social systems and structures by aiming to only use the most effective habits, behaviours, and structures within their modes of operation. Further, these formal systems can be enchanting in themselves as such a system "[...] offers consumers, workers, and managers efficiency, calculability, predictability, and control" (Ritzer 2010: 74-80; 2001: 198). Though the enchanting effect seems to be short lived and requires continuous reenchantment (Ritzer 2010: 6, 7, 74-80, 103). Many of these new cathedrals of consumption mix roles between the consumer and the employee, self-checkout machines at grocery stores and filling in order forms for Amazon are examples of this prosuming phenomenon – consuming and producing simultaneously (Ritzer, et al. 2012: 379). This merging is also evident in the structures and functions of these institutions – making use of multiple services, and types of merchandise – once reserved for separate individual businesses, are matriculated not only under one business, but within one website or store. Ritzer draws from Baudrillard to term merging social institutions as implosions, or the breaking of boundaries and loss, or mixing, of meaning (Baudrillard, MacClean 1985: 580-581; Ritzer 2010: 118-122).

Further implosion can be seen in the merging of leisure with consumerism and commodification. The increasing costs and varieties of goods at baseball venues, as well as exorbitant ticket costs are a good example of leisure becoming increasingly dependent on consuming and financial capital, effectively removing working class elements from the pass time, and imposing more control, predictability, and quantity (costs) over the game (Ritzer, Stillman 2001: 107). Moreover, Maria Bakardjieva (2014) has demonstrated that this implosion and rationalising of leisure has extended into friendship. Where

once friendships were formed largely through face-to-face interactions, leisure, and sincere attempts at increasing intersubjectivity; these efforts have now, in part, been replaced by online interactions. Such online interactions expedite relationships and rationalise friendships by quantifying (friends lists, cataloguing interactions through 'Facebook Memories'), controlling (privacy settings), and creating predictability and convenience (friends can always be found in the same online 'location') through non-human technologies which remove physical aspects of human interaction.

The new cathedrals of consumption are directly drawn from Ritzer's own further exploration and treatment of formal rationalisation, which he terms as McDonaldization, that: "A society characterized by rationality is one which emphasizes efficiency, predictability, calculability, substitution of non-human for human technology and control over uncertainty" (Ritzer 1983: 100). The sociologist pushes a critical view of McDonaldization, one that acknowledges the importance of these systems in allowing for the development of economic, bureaucratic, and technological efficiency, however, he also stresses the importance of understanding these systems as transforming social reality in ways that may, and often do, pose dangers and irrational rationality. This rationalisation stems from groups that retain a strong interest in rationalising various systems within 'Western' society and the world, which in large part relates to monetary gains. When focusing on the main tenets of McDonaldization, efficiency relates to "[...] the best or optimum means to any given end" (Ritzer 1983: 101). These systems however are not self-contained, in that they do not operate independently of other systems, and as such, the rationalisation of a fast-food restaurant, will require the rationalisation of food processing plants, transportation, and farms. With this in consideration, it becomes apparent how the 'iron cage' can spread from a relatively small segment of society to become prevalent throughout society and the world. The importance of predictability within rationalised systems entails the need for "[...] discipline, order, systematization, formalization, routine, consistency and methodical operation" (Ritzer 1983: 101).

The importance of these factors in creating predictability is due to the need for uniformed commodified goods, which eliminates surprise and uncertainty; ensuring consumers are satisfied in their desires, and that businesses and corporations have a reliable supply of goods to deliver. Further, quality is difficult to gauge and as such is difficult to integrate into a rationalised system, consequently quantifiable elements are focused upon within McDonaldized settings. This emphasis on quantity is argued to be the most important aspect within formalisation. Ritzer (2018: 89-90) focuses on the McDonalds' hamburger as being advertised as having sold over one billion units, while the product itself is also measured quantitatively; 'quarter pounder with cheese'. While these techniques do have positive connotations and outcomes, they ultimately exhibit dangers, that are prevalent in what the sociologist terms non-human technologies – i.e., orders of operation, robots,

and self-regulating machines that limit the abilities of workers in their choice of work. While this, again, can be positive as it creates uniformity, predictability, calculability, and control. This positivity is negated by negative effects on the workers, who tend to feel alienation, and may even sabotage, under such systems – the replacement of workers, not only with less skilled other human workers, but with machines and robots, consequently eliminating labour positions is another possible, or even inevitable consequence of these systems (Ritzer 2018: 157-160).

2. Postemotionalism

While Ritzer's McDonaldization allows an understanding of the technologies and systems at work within the formal rationalisation of society, it does not focus on emotive elements, at least explicitly, as Meštrović own treatment of formal rationalisation does. Meštrović draws from and builds upon Baudrillard's concept of circulating fictions to support his arguments that within postemotional societies, emotions have been nullified through confusing emotional symbolic representations and attachments. According to the sociologist, strong action causing emotions tend to be replaced with those of weaker emotions, or these strong emotions may be attached to relatively non-consequential events (Meštrović 1997: xi, 25, 44). These circulating fictions make use of dead and appropriated emotions; like circulating fictions, circulating emotions are associated with events that are no longer consequential within society, or never were to begin with (Meštrović 1997: 62). These fictions and simulations are the results of inner-directed typed people controlling and manipulating other-directed types through emotional simplifications, simulations, and control, consequently creating an ultra-other-directed society; a postemotional society (Meštrović 1997: 36, 44). This section will demonstrate how postemotional and McDonaldized processes within society lead to implosions, whether they are emotions converging with each other, or the use of emotions to manipulate sociability to create convergences, including that of leisure with labour.

The concepts of inner and other-directed types are drawn from the Durkheimian-Veblenian sociologist, David Riesman. The seminal publication by Riesman et al., *The Lonely Crowd*, argued that an increase in consumerism resulted from the American middle class's desire and need to, 'keep up with the Joneses', so to speak; being self-conscious of the number and prestige of material belongings while exhibiting trends associated with conspicuous consumption (1969: 149-156). Before this trend, American society was dominated by inner-directed types, individuals with traits associated with independence, emotional expressiveness, harshness, and violence, yet

paradoxically more unified, and less prone to unpredictable levels of violence (ibid, 14). Riesman believed consumerism established a transition from an inner-directed type, due to constant self-conscious behaviours and envying of neighbours, to an other-directed type, who are characterised by superficial tolerance, nullified and repressed emotions, and larger trends of insincere behaviour in a Goffmanian sense (ibid, 16). Meštrović indicates the televising of the Vietnam War and the JFK assassination, investigation, and trial led to the sacredness of death and American governmental authority being placed into the profane. This ultimately fractured the civil religion or collective consciousness and effervescence of the United States of America. Such fracturing in turn led to vast distrust and suspicion, and ultimately compounded the other-directed type into the postemotional. Consequently, this type experiences yearning for past-emotions, due in part to difficulties fully integrating with the other and others. This yearning leaves the postemotional individual susceptible to the commodification and branding of products and narratives that are marketed as being capable of fulfilling those emotional needs (Meštrović 1997: 49, 5, 127). Consequently, the culture industry, a term Meštrović (1997: 74) borrows from Adorno, sells falsely authentic emotions and fictions to consumers.

In her study of postemotionalism on twitter and in the reality television show *Catfish: The T.V. Show*, Apryl A. Williams states that: "Viewers turn to reality television for emotional affirmation and a sense of identity but consequentially fail to find either" (2016: 93). She adds credence to postemotional theory by exploring how emotions are commodified through television, twitter, and how participation culture intertwines with online and conventional media technologies. The show itself, presents postemotional responses to what would generally be very emotionally charged situations, Williams (ibid, 99-101) gives the example of a man, Mike, who discovers he had been catfished (led into a romantic online relationship by an individual using a false identity) and understandably expresses anger towards his masquerader, Kristen. He questions her motives for such behaviour, however, upon discovering Kristen's deceitfulness resulted from an accident causing her physical harm and suicidal feelings and desires, Mike became more sympathetic towards her situation. By the end of the episode, Mike was presented as a sort of hero, as a person who aided a woman in great distress. This, despite Mike not realising he was helping at all, while his emotions regarding the deceit he fell victim to ultimately went unanswered. Williams interprets this: "Although he has the right to be upset with Kristen because of her lies, the postemotional atmosphere dictates that he must show some empathy toward her or risk seeming like a "jerk" in the eyes of his peers which include Max and Nev as well as the entire viewing audience"[1] (Williams 2016: 100). So, Williams clearly shows the postemotional control, and predictability, of the show, regarding Mike's inability to express anger due to anger not being an emotion desired by the audience. Further, the participation culture evident in the show's intermingling

with twitter reveals postemotionalised aspects, as twitter users responded with belief that the show depicted sincere emotions, and not a dramatized experience. Consequently, these tweeters circulate emotional fictions creating support for the show in attempts to empathise with the show's characters, and fellow internet users (ibid, 101-102). The author continues and discusses the other-directedness of postemotionalism found in the show and twitter participation culture:

> in part, to the other-directed need for emotional affirmation. This need for affirmation drives the people on the show to construct false identities. At the same time, it inhibits their ability to empathize with the people they have fooled both their partners and the viewing audience. The same need compels audiences to tune in weekly and to discuss the show with their friends and followers on Facebook and Twitter. (Williams 2016: 102-103)

As the quote illustrates, the media industry, whether it is social media or a television show, manipulates and controls emotions, taking advantage of postemotional needs for sociability, and relationships, as well as insecurities and inabilities to fully satisfy desires through such mediums and media. The relationship Williams shows between older and newer ways of communicating and the postemotional formalisation of society requires further examination, as it is apparent that relationships between these media and their associated culture or media industries have a strong rationalising influence on the emotions and relationships of individuals. Further, it is evident that a merging or implosion of leisure, labour, and sociability are at play here. Viewers watch the show as a leisure experience, but engage in discussions through Twitter and Facebook, which creates more attention and interest for the show; effectively, Twitter users advertise the show. Though few would consider 'tweeting' about a reality television show as labour, it still remains that the individuals involved are using their time, to discuss and contemplate, and inadvertently advertise the show. De Kosnik supports this, positioning a similar argument regarding fans as advertisers, stating that: "[...] fan activity, instead of being dismissed as insignificant [...] should be valued as a new form of publicity and advertising, authored by volunteers, that corporations badly need in an era of market fragmentation. In other words, fan production is a category of work" (De Kosnik 2013: 127).

The Internet and especially web pages are an important area to illustrate how postemotionalism and McDonaldization merge. Ritzer is explicit in describing McDonaldization's relation to the internet, that it encompasses and creates new means and modes of consumption allowing for an implosion of labour, leisure, and consumption, i.e., new cathedrals of consumption. Further, I have mentioned how Bakardejieva's work on McDonaldization demonstrates control and predictability over friendships in online spaces. While Meštrović does not take a strong consideration of the Internet into his analysis, many characteristics of postemotional types can be easily noted as coinciding with the effects and processes of McDonaldization.

The Internet and online spaces as non-human technologies, allows at once an individual removed from strong action causing emotions, superficial tolerance, and insincerity, which rings strong with social structures and actors influenced by postemotionalism (nullified and controlled emotions). The postemotional actor is characterised as expressing curdled indignation, or other strong emotions, but focused on rather trivial things that inner-directed or even other-directed types may see as baffling to consider of importance; let alone appropriate for strong emotional displays (Meštrović 1997: 57-58). Most noticeably, curdled indignation is a common characteristic of internet users – see YouTube and news site comment sections for examples. Strong emotionally charged expressions directed at seemingly minor incidents associated with fandoms is a common occurrence online, such as the death-threats and outraged reaction to Anita Sarkeesian's critique of gender within video-games; though misogyny quite clearly played a role as well (Chess, Shaw 2015: 218).

Moreover Shawn P. Van Valkenburgh's (2018: 13-14) work on the 'manosphere' found manuals describing the need to disregard the emotions and feelings of women, in favour of manipulative rationalised tactics for controlling and pressuring women into sex. Viewed from a postemotionalism perspective, these serve as examples of circulating fictions as well as emotional negation. These appropriate narratives and emotions from women and minorities, through claims of discrimination, which are then used to further perpetrate misogyny against women (i.e., women have superiority over men because of society). Moreover, the desire to ignore or mitigate strong emotions, as the men (and others) of the 'manosphere' attempt to do, is a common aspect of not only these male subcultures, but wider society as a whole.

So, it is apparent that the structures of the Internet largely lack face-to-face interaction, and this coupled with anonymity are likely to exasperate the postemotional condition (ultra-ultra-other-directed?). The Internet is then, very much a non-human technology in these aspects, as it is used to control emotions and human interaction offering circulating fictions and communities constructed around the reenchantment of misogyny, or controlled emotional reactions as present in Williams' case study. Further, all of these communities are rationalised around predictability associated with narratives, which are ever present in easy to find and read areas of the forum, or on twitter regarding *Catfish*. The 'manosphere' community also appears to be quantifiable, in that it offers ways to be removed from non-quantifiable elements of human interaction such as emotions.

Meštrović's (1997) thesis relies heavily on the notion of Balkanization, or the fracturing of society into smaller and smaller social groups, and causing, emotions, morals, and identities to be increasingly constructed by these smaller groups. The author indicates:

> other-directedness leads to a splintering of group identities and reference groups. Thus, the collective consciousness has been Balkanized, which is something that Durkheim anticipated. The result is that postemotional humans try desperately to recapture the emotional energy that used to be achieved through collective effervescence, yet fail more often than they succeed. (Meštrović 1997: 102)

As such, and Thomas Luckmann (2002: 25-26) takes a similar view as Meštrović (1997: xii, 1-2, 68), the lack of national level unification leaves more meso- and micro-institutions within communities to construct more localised collective consciousnesses and effervescences. However, an increased individualisation is also noted, in which the individual is increasingly prioritised, resulting in less cohesive social integration within groups, even primary groups. With this in mind, to dismiss macro-influences, especially media influences would be short sighted, as I will present in the following section, fandom, or fanaticism, within transmedial worlds plays an important role within the postemotionalisation and McDonaldization of society.

3. Convergence Culture, Transmedial Worlds

It is apparent then when these perspectives on formal rationalisation are considered in conjunction, that social structures, technology, and the life-world are experiencing a shift towards operating within systems designed to be efficient, calculable, quantifiable, and controllable, which includes our emotional relations to society and others. Ritzer's nonhuman technology and Meštrović's focus on media causes for the rise of postemotionalism suggests a stronger focus on these two aspects is needed to understand how postemotionalism and McDonaldization are being used to create commodifying relationships with fan fiction authors. Transmedial worlds theory and convergence culture, can largely account for how media is taking shape within the contemporary era, and offer a semiotic analysis of media construction that gives a more detailed understanding of media constructs.

Convergence culture a cultural and technological shift within society terms three common societal trends; media convergence, participatory culture, and collective intelligence (Jenkins 2006: 2). Media convergence refers to the use of multiple media and associated technologies and platforms to convey similar media information, this draws heavily from the activity of prosumers, or individuals in participatory culture, searching for information, and interacting with other actors and entities associated with the associated media (ibid, 3). However, this does not mean prosumers are inherently benefiting from this process, and the scholar stresses the importance of hierarchies and power relations among media executives, prosumers, and other associated actors. A major process of social interaction within these communities is described by

collective intelligence, or the ability for members to collectively utilise their intelligence and knowledge of a subject as a form of 'media power' (Jenkins 2006: 2-4).

Jenkins exemplifies collective intelligence with a case study of an internet forum dedicated to predicting and discovering mysteries and spoilers to upcoming episodes of the reality television show, *Survivor* (ibid, 26-29). The acts of the forum's members –– searching for information, interpreting, and discussing the show creates a new dynamic related to the television show through online and 'real' spheres. This constructs media power, as it further creates interest in the concerned media, attracts interest of the media industry, and creates new information. A noted construction of convergence culture is transmedial worlds, and according to Annika Wik, the narratives associated with these worlds transcend different media and medians, basically media convergence (Wik 2010: 74).

Transmedial worlds also entail audience interaction, and involvement in production. This interaction is symptomatic of the audience shifting from passively viewing, to actively participating in their media, interacting with technologies and other fans, as well as adding to the construction of the transmedial world (Wik 2010: 74-75, 87). Henry Jenkins describes the transmedial world as "[...] transmedia storytelling. A transmedia story unfolds across multiple media platforms, with each new text making a distinctive and valuable contribution to the whole" (Jenkins 2006: 95-96). However, he makes the point that each contribution needs to be self-contained, to be a stand-alone story. The theorist draws from Umberto Eco, to illustrate the point that a film needs to be segmented, memorable, quotable, and reach as many audiences as possible to be a complete world and retain cult status. These characteristics allow a film to be built upon and further transmedialised, and this is materialised through the importance of references and details that allow and facilitate media consumers to analyse a complex depiction, which draws them further into the world (Eco 1985: 3-5; Jenkins 2006: 96).

Participation culture is evident in transmedial worlds as quite a dominant factor in their creation, and consequently these worlds are not solely constructed by media corporations and studios. Jenkins (2006) describes these worlds as convergences between the corporate and individual realities, and that this:

> Convergence does not occur through media appliances, however, sophisticated they may become. Convergence occurs within the brains of individual consumers and through their social interactions with others. Each of us constructs our own personal mythology from bits and fragments of information extracted from the media flow and transformed into resources through which we make sense of our everyday lives. Because there is more information on any given topic than anyone can store in their head, there is an added incentive for us to talk among ourselves about the media we consume. This conversation creates buzz that is increasingly valued by the media industry. (Jenkins 2006: 3-4)

The literature supports Jenkins' argument, as it appears those raised in a society with a large transmedial presence are more likely to be inclined towards transmedial narratives. Consequently, to effectively teach literature and writing skills many types of media integrated with transmedial narration and construction of fan fiction is deemed as beneficial for the engagement of students (Chandler-Olcott, Mahar 2003: 381; Gerber, Price 2011: 69). Moreover, those born within the widespread use and access to transmedial technologies are more likely to take them for granted and view them as parts of everyday institutionalised life, contrary to their older counterparts (Lewis, Fabos 2005: 471-473).

The institutionalisation and popularity of transmedial worlds does not only come from technological changes and innovations, but as Jenkins describes, they are constructed within individual minds. This in turn means actors are constructing, individually and within collective intelligences, narratives pertaining to morals, emotions, and dramatics. While Pierre Levy believes collective intelligences may have the ability to disrupt corporate capitalist economic systems (2001: 225), and I believe participating in these collectives may encourage greater social cohesion by reconstructing a collective effervescence and consciousness that may create groups organised around other more grassroots economic systems to emerge. However, it is evident that the media industry has a strong grasp on transmedial worlds when the postemotionalisation and McDonaldization of society are considered, therefore I have doubts that such groups or disruptions are sustainably possible.

I believe this is also apparent per Jenkins description of the media industry's ability to use massive amounts of information, on multiple platforms that transmedial worlds are constructed from, to take further control and canonise these worlds (2006: 20, 69-70, 255-256). Maria Lindgren Leavenworth (2011) shines some light on canonisation, as she takes an interest in fan fiction and attempts to use "[...] some of the characteristics of transmedial texts and see these in relation to tendencies in the production of fan fic connected to *The Vampire Diaries*". *The Vampire Diaries* have grown from a series first penned by L. J. Smith, to include a television series and a considerable fan-base. The scholar mentions that the series lacks a strong canonising authority, and as such fan fiction writers are able to retain more creativity, especially in alternative universe settings. However, the further development of the books and television series makes it difficult for fans to choose which gaps to fill in (Leavenworth 2011). So, even a lightly canonised or centralised transmedial world can be controlled by canonising forces, as Leavenworth shows through the difficulties fan fiction writers experience as canonised pieces, are capable of complicating and taking authority over fan fiction pieces. These canonisations must also work in accordance with narrative structuring. According to Lisbeth Klastrup and Susana Tosca's analysis of the semiotic structures of transmedial worlds, to type a narrative or media as

belonging to a transmedial word, there must be a similarity in its identification; mainly relating to the text's genre, themes, and common characters of the world (2004: 1). The scholars offer the three concepts of ethos, topos, and mythos to exemplify this typification (Klastrup, Tosca 2004: 1). They note how these concepts relate to genre as applied to transmedial worlds:

> A genre allows for minor variations (think for example of the very different ethos of Alien and Starship Troopers, both science fiction films). If genres are themes, transmedial worlds are themes plus a common background story, which makes them narrower in scope, but also means that its incarnations are more coherent and homogeneous than those of a genre. (Klastrup, Tosca 2004: 2)

They continue and describe mythos as the backstory of a world, including the characters, as well as mythical or fabled objects, mythologies and more concretely or widely accepted aspects by the characters within the world. The topos refers to the setting, geography, time period, and the physics of the world (Klastrup, Tosca 2004: 4). Lastly, the ethos is "[...] the explicit and implicit ethics of the world and (moral) codex of behavior, which characters in the world are supposed to follow" (ibid, 4).

Moreover, the ethos aids in creating characters, as it also encompasses the moral and ethical behaviours of the actors within the transmedial world. The scholars describe the importance of maintaining these concepts by discussing a break in the ethos, associated with *The Lord of the Rings*[2] book and film franchise, found in the video game adaptation The *Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Rings*[3]. The ethos of the game is described as mundane in relation to the films and books, or what Klastrup and Tosca describe as "[...] where the illusion completely breaks apart" (2004: 6). This breakdown is due to the roles and tasks the characters play belonging to the realm of everyday life scenarios such as fetching fruits and vegetables, instead of conducting quests and playing a role associated with courage and bravado – a role that is expected of the *Lord of The Rings* heroes. The scholars describe this loss of ethos:

> Quests only gain significance if you can relate them to the transmedial world. For example, the first hard quest is to avoid the black riders in order to leave the shire, something that took us quite a few attempts filled with dread at the perspective of being caught by the evil beings. When we finally succeeded, it was with a great sense of triumph and achievement. This quest is actually part of the original story (even if in another form). The problem arises when in order to create more gameplay, the designers expand the cyberworld with meaningless, against-the-transmedial-ethos, quests. (Klastrup, Tosco 2004: 6)

So, it is notable that there is a strong emotional, narrative, and moral aspect to transmedial worlds, especially as proposed by the concept of ethos and collective intelligence, and it is also apparent that their centralisation, within the media industry, ultimately means that these institutions retain control over the canonisation of the world. With this in thought, it is appropriate to consider

the financial aspects of these worlds, to understand how convergence culture and transmedial worlds are related to labour, and economics. As stated earlier through Jenkins, they are in part influenced by marketing, as well as presented through marketing, consequently being created by both dynamics; as an example, the popularity of the *Star Wars*[4] character Boba Fett, once considered a secondary character of the franchise, has grown into the protagonist of a number of *Star Wars* instalments. This can be related to the popularity of the action figure, and the *Star Wars* fandom's interest in Boba Fett; fan interactions associated with *Star Wars*, were noticed by business savvy marketers, and the character was consequently given more focus within the overall transmedial world (Jenkins 2006: 114-115).

Further, it is important to understand how transmedial worlds relate to affective economics, as: "According to the logic of affective economics, the ideal consumer is active, emotionally engaged and socially networked" (ibid, 20). Consequently, when the moral, emotional, participation culture, collective intelligence, and community aspects of transmedial worlds and convergence culture are considered, it would appear quite easy for media companies to use these characteristics to manipulate fans and prosumers into such economic systems. These dynamics and mechanisms revealed by transmedial worlds and convergence culture perspectives, demonstrate how macro level media influences gain emotional and communal commitments by imploding, or converging media and roles, placing the consumer into a place of participating in a communal, creative, and emotional world.

4. Fan fiction and Identity

Turning focus towards the literature on fan fiction, Steven F. Kruger (2010: 918) illustrates how the Internet allows sexual minorities, in his study of homosexual men, to distribute, create, and merchandise erotica and pornography as various media types. This helps to form communities around similar interests, while also including a shared identity through a commodified product. Anupam Chander and Madhavi Sunder (2007: 157-158) offer a similar point on fan fiction allowing for those marginalised from more popular franchises to create and form their own related narratives. Further, Catherine Hoad states that: "Through exploring the phenomenon of heavy metal fan fiction and its online circulation, I argue that fan fiction enables a sense of community and fandom for young women who have been marginalized within heavy metal scenes" (2017: 6).

Her study consequently found that fan fiction centred on heavy metal, and largely authored by girls and women in online spaces, allowed for the challenging of gender norms within the heavy metal music scene, as well as helping to create legitimisation for women and girl-fans of the genre and scene.

This also aided in adding gender minority themes, further broadening space for a diverse range of people (Hoad 2017: 18). Despite this allowance for community building and creation of inclusive narratives, fan fiction encompasses gender inequalities as well (De Kosnik 2009: 118-119). The majority of fan fiction authors are women, and despite commercial interest in the fiction, and profits being made, most authors do not receive financial compensation for their work (ibid, 118-119).

However, in her case-study of fan fiction and adolescent development, Rebecca W. Black noted that writing fan fiction online allowed for a young immigrant student to shape an identity that was not immediately formed by the interactions and roles placed on her in a school setting (2006: 182). The child, identified in the paper under the pseudonym Nanako, was able to explore her identity, gain support and a fandom, while also working on both her English and Mandarin language skills. The study on Nanako concludes stating that adolescents using fan fiction to engage with online communities may be able:

> to discursively position and represent themselves as conversant members in a pluralistic space that fosters a positive sense of self. Moreover, the site also provides a safe, supportive, and meaningful venue, not only for language learning and literacy development, but also for affiliating and commiserating with other youth around social and cultural issues that are central to their lives. Finally, in this site, language learning and identity development are not characterized as movement toward some fixed, monocultural standard. Instead, literate and social engagement in this space involves a great deal of communication and a fluid process of meaning-making and identity negotiation that traverses national, linguistic, and cultural borders, and that is and will continue to be ongoing. (Black 2006: 183)

It is evident, from Black's study that fan fiction has the ability to aid in positive identity development, community building, and the acquisition of language skills. Karen E. Dill-Shackleford, Kristin Hopper-Losenicky, Cynthia Vinney, Lisa F. Swain, and Jerri Lynn Hogg note similar positive influences from fans meaningfully engaging with texts, where they argue that watching eudaimonic television or audio-visual media allows media consumers to better deal with social issues, by interpreting and relating their own experiences to controlled fictions (Dill-Shackleford et al. 2015: 154). The authors continue to argue that these results are improved through the coupling of eudaimonic audio visual media and social media; that:

> the reader will see how fans devote intense energy to understanding the human relationships presented in a fictional television narrative. A good deal of the social media conversation focuses on issues of meaning making – on sorting out social judgments and values, comparing the narrative to one's real life experiences and to experiencing emotions in the context of the narrative. (Dill-Shakleford et al. 2015: 155)

Fan fiction tends to positively benefit those who partake in it, not only allowing for the exploration and assertion of identity, but for new avenues to recognise, learn about, and understanding one's own life-world. Fan fiction sites can also

become quite communal; Russian language *Harry Potter* fan fiction for instance, has grown to be a multinational community encompassing thousands of writers who participate in festivals, contests, regulations, and debates. Moreover, this community encompasses a wide variety of demographics regarding age and sexuality, though women are predominantly overrepresented (Samutina 2016: 256-257). Emotions and affect are noted as playing an exceptionally important role within the community: "Excessive emotionality is one of the influential discursive norms for describing one's aesthetic impressions to the community. Emoticons and exclamation marks, the axiological slang of the internet generation are a must-have in readers' responses [...]" (ibid, 257). The strength of these emotions also tends to result in binge reading, allowing readers to immerse themselves in fantasy for long periods of time. Further, readers make judgments and evaluations upon texts within the community, which include declarations of emotional responses to the literature (ibid, 259). The online structures related to fan fiction help, in part, to allow these communities to be constructed; the ease and multiple locations websites can be interacted with, for instance, allows users to connect with such communities significantly more than if they were only present on personal desktops, or through face-to-face engagements, or mail correspondence.

Judging from the literature just reviewed, fan fiction has great potential, and for many this potential is realised, for positively influencing lives and communities. However, as the following will note, without the intentions of refuting the above, this may not always be the case, and that fan fiction in contemporary contexts has the potential for negative disruptions for the purposes of commodification. More specifically, when McDonaldization, postemotionalism, transmedial worlds theory, and convergence culture are taken into consideration, the structures surrounding fan fiction and the work itself take on more complicated connotations. Mainly, it becomes apparent how these structures can be used to control and exploit fan fiction authors.

5. Discussion

Fan fiction has been shown to be beneficial for those who participate in the writing process, and the communities these writers participate within are catalysts for this. However, these sites are very much part of transmedial worlds participating in convergence culture and are consequentially inundated with McDonaldizing systems and postemotionalism. Ritzer clearly states that McDonaldized systems have beneficial consequences due to their increased reliability, and the same can be said for postemotionalism, which has resulted in less violence, especially when compared to our inner-directed counterparts. Transmedial worlds and convergence culture also represent engaged, vast, information rich realities for individuals to partake in. So, it is no surprise that

fan fiction writers experience beneficial and supportive consequences for participating in fan fiction writing and communities.

However, manipulative mechanisms and commodification are still quite evident in fan fiction, and its relation to the Internet, itself a non-human technology that greatly McDonaldizes the writings of authors. As stated earlier, the presence of fan fiction on the internet allows easy access to readers, moreover, online space allows fan fiction communities to be easily accessible and removed from the physical offline world, making human interaction more predictable, and controlled.

Structures within the site aid in McDonaldization and postemotionalisation as well; for instance, search-bars contribute to the ease of finding preferred subjects and titles, the English language *Harry Potter* fan fiction website, harrypotterfanfiction.com ("Harry Potter Fan Fiction" 2020a, 2020b), specialises their search-bar, allowing readers to search for genre, titles, characters involved and pairings of these characters, eras, spoilers and more. This, in turn, can be used by readers to control the content of stories they read, through filtering out undesired story specifics. Quantifiability and calculability can also be seen through the site's labelling of stories with word counts, allowing readers to know the estimated amounts of time it may take to read a story. This is taken even further on the page's twitter feed – visible on the website, marking an implosion between the two pages – which presents an advertisement for "4 of the most intense fan fiction stories" and the accompanying text reads: "Are you in the mood for intense Harry Potter fanfic stories you can read within an hour? Here are 4 of our favorites!". ("Harry Potter Fan Fiction" 2020a). So, the structure of the website in itself is not only McDonaldized, but the content and its presentation and marketing are also McDonaldized.

The non-technological aspect of online fan fiction also stems from the postemotional. Possibly, authors no longer look to close friends and family, or publishing professionals for advice and evaluations of their work, but present their works to multinational communities, the Russian speaking world in Natalia Samutina's case. Consequently, their work is evaluated, on emotional and technical levels, from vast communities mediated through non-human technologies.

While fan fiction emotions and narratives may not necessarily be as manipulative as is evident in William's work on *Catfish*, it is apparent that fictionalised emotions, embedded in the circulating fiction that is *Harry Potter*, are being created, distributed, and consumed through a medium that excludes face-to-face contact, consequently abstracting emotions into semantics, syntax, and personal interpretations.

Fan fiction as a component of transmedial worlds, is related to marketing and advertisements, especially when regarded through affective economics, and convergence culture as these communities create emotional commitments and participation with multimedia which is capitalised upon

through the community's unwaged labour. This presents an ability for these websites to circulate fictions, which allows the continued labouring and construction of not only websites, but of the associated fictions (though not necessarily canonised) and the associated transmedial worlds. Consequently, it is apparent the leisure activities of these writers within these communities, very much translates to labour. Terranova is informed to this, as she has demonstrated that labours of pleasure are being manipulated for consumption and exploitation throughout online spaces – that industries are using commitment to building online spaces, as a source of free labour (2013: 33, 53-54). Moreover, Abigail De Kosnik notes that the work associated with maintaining and creating fandoms is in fact labour, though classified as leisure, which plays a part in fan commodification, as fan fiction authors do not tend to consider their contributions as labour, and consequently do not expect to sell their work (2013: 141).

However, when postemotionalism is considered, other aspects accounting for this implosion are apparent (though this does not negate Terranova or De Kosnik) that largely relate to emotions and community. The fracturing of the collective consciousness and effervescence, and the increasing performance of the social through non-human technologies like the Internet, has resulted in individuals searching for a community to satisfy the social need to participation in a collective consciousness and effervescence.

Further, the exasperated other-directedness of the postemotional actor suggests that the search for emotional and social satisfaction is more likely to take place outside of the family in favour of the other. Per this postemotional consideration, transmedial worlds offer forms of emotional experiences, through transmedial representations, participation culture, and marketing, especially affective economics – media and culture industries are able to create products that are based around emotions, and community.

Moreover, this community, while facilitated through online institutions, like fan fiction websites and Internet forums, is almost entirely fan created. It is also apparent, especially when Samutina's binge reading teens are considered – as well as the importance online communities play in allowing minorities to express their own narratives – that the fans create the emotions for these communities, even if the/their construction is largely mediated through non-human technologies.

So, the exploitation of fans also stems from their creation of a community that gives them a fragment of collective consciousness and effervescence. In other words, these communities enable fan fiction authors to participate in creating an ethos, interact with individuals who seemingly have similar or the same interests, morals, and values, while expressing their own narratives, and receiving and contributing emotional expressions. The lack of compensation for their labour and the consequential exploitation does not seem to be so surprising then; as a postemotional actor, who is able to gain

community and the consequential emotions, may value these relationships over proper accommodation for their sold labour.

Moreover, the mythos, topos, and ethos of transmedial worlds are not only used to attract individuals to transmedial franchises, but act as incentives for individuals to remain within a transmedial community, by allowing members to participate within media creation through collective intelligence. For a postemotional fan fiction writer to participate in creating these worlds, they are able to reproduce circulating fictions and their associated emotions, consequently experiencing them, though never fully effervescing them.

Further, the communities themselves will develop a history and collective characteristics imitative of a collective consciousness; as friendships, histories, and seminal works are developed, members will become more and more attached to their fan fiction communities due to the emotions and intersubjectivity these situations and relationships will create. However, they will likely never fully gain effervescence, as these communities cannot grow to encompass the entirety of the members' lives. It is then apparent, that while these communities express emotions from a formal rationalised non-human median, and are commodified and controlled through the media industry and affective economics, these emotions and communities act as enchanting agents over the formal rationalising systems embedded in their structures. As such, community and emotions are used to enchant the implosion of labour and leisure, and non-human technologies allowing for the continuation of the (re)production of fan fiction, circulating fictions, and the commodification of fan fiction texts.

Conclusion

Having examined the relationship between McDonaldization, postemotionalism, transmedial worlds, convergence culture, and fan fiction, it is apparent that dynamic social structures and processes are being utilised to at once create a more organised and technological world, while also alienating an already anomic actor operating within manipulative dehumanising systems. The implosions developed through postemotional, McDonaldized, and convergence culture consumerism have resulted in individuals reliant on others, yet insecure in their relationships and desiring the emotions of a collective effervescence and collective consciousness.

The implosion of labour and leisure, within online fan fiction communities demonstrates how rationalised non-human technology has resulted in emotionally rich narratives and creativity, though ultimately these emotions and narratives are recycled fictions, continuously circulating to support and continue transmedial worlds, to the benefit of media and culture industries. Effectively, these macro structures and media have resulted in

further segmentation and minimisation of the communal. These social mechanisms and structures have allowed for an enchantment and reenchantment of rationalised and exploitative mechanisms, through the creation of communities that play into the emotional needs of individuals, while gaining profits and support from these individuals through the implosion of labour and leisure.

Ritzer, Meštrović, and the convergence culture and transmedial worlds theorists have demonstrated the importance of understanding organisational, technological, and over all social phenomenon in their entirety, as these perspectives demonstrate how, much like leisure has been imploded with labour, utopia and progress have imploded with dystopia and stagnation, and the communal with a social desire. Consequently, the synthesis of McDonaldization, postemotionalism, convergence culture and transmedial worlds theory is important for understanding the two faces of social reality; postemotional McDonaldized transmedial worlds creating immersive creative communities, that commodify its members' work and leave them in circulating fictions and emotions.

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Notes

1 Nev and Max are hosts of the television show *Catfish*, which has aired on MTV since 2012, and is produced by Catfish Picture Media and Relativity Media. The specific scenario discussed by Williams is from *Mike & Kristen*, the 7th episode of the 2nd *Catfish: The T.V. Show* season, which aired August 6, 2013. (Williams 2016; IMDb.com 2021, see https://www.imdb.com/title/tt3091218/?ref_=ttep_ep8)

2 Based on books first authored by J. R. R. Tolkien, the franchise has grown to encompass a transmedial world including video games, films, fan fiction, clothes, and many other mediums.

3 Released in 2002 under publisher, Black Label Games and developed by WXP, Pocket Studios, and Surreal Software.

4 Based on the films of George Lucas, Star Wars has grown to encompass a transmedial world which includes toys, videogames, novels, further films and many more products and mediums.

TOTALITARIANISM IN VIDEO GAMES: A semiotic analysis of *Beholder's* narrative

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Abstract. Totalitarianism and dystopia have traditionally been one of the most popular themes for designers to create rich narratives. This paper attempts a dynamic semiotic reading of *Beholder's* dystopian world, an adventure game, based on storytelling. Our main goal is to reconstruct the semantic universe around which the game is themed as a concrete set of meanings and to highlight the semiotics of totalitarianism and how playfulness is shaped through the use of mechanics of interface. To do so, we analyse the introductory cutscene as a text, through semiotics' analytic point of view, exploring the semiotic systems that compose the meaning produced and investigating the kind of interaction and playfulness in relation to the interface, within the broader field of game studies.

Keywords: interactive digital storytelling, semiotics, totalitarianism

Totalitarism videomängudes: Beholderi narratiivi semiootiline analüüs

Abstraktne. Totalitarism ja düstoopia on traditsiooniliselt olnud disainerite jaoks üks populaarsemaid teemasid rikkalike narratiivide loomiseks. Käesolevas töös üritatakse Beholderi düstoopilise maailma, seiklusmängu dünaamilist semiootilist lugemist, mis põhineb lugude jutustamisel. Meie peamine eesmärk on rekonstrueerida semantiline universum, mille ümber mäng on temaatiseeritud kui konkreetne tähenduste kogum, ning tuua esile totalitarismi semiootika ja see, kuidas mängulisus on kujundatud liidese mehaanika abil. Selleks analüüsime sissejuhatavat vahekokkuvõtet kui teksti semiootika analüütilise vaatenurga kaudu, uurides semiootilisi süsteeme, mis moodustavad toodetud tähenduse, ning uurides, millist interaktsiooni ja mängulisust kasutajaliidesega seoses mängude uurimise laiemas valdkonnas kasutatakse.

Märksõnad: interaktiivne digitaalne jutustamine, semiootika, totalitarism

Totalitarismo en Videojuegos: Un Análisis Semiotico de la Narrativa de Beholder

Resumen. El totalitarismo y la distopía han sido tradicionalmente uno de los temas más populares entre los diseñadores para crear grandes narraciones. En este artículo se intenta realizar una lectura semiótica

dinámica del mundo distópico de Beholder, un juego de aventuras, basado en la narración. Nuestro principal objetivo es reconstruir el universo semántico en torno al cual se basa el juego como un conjunto concreto de significados y poner de relieve la semiótica del totalitarismo y cómo se configura la ludificación mediante el uso de mecánicas de interfaz. Para ello, analizamos la escena introductoria como un texto, a través del punto de vista analítico de la semiótica, explorando los sistemas semióticos que componen el significado producido e investigando el tipo de interacción y la ludicidad en relación con la interfaz, dentro del campo más amplio de los estudios del juego.

Palabras clave: narración digital interactiva, semiótica, totalitarismo

1. Totalitarianism in video games

Totalitarianism, from the dawn of the 20th century to the present day, has irreparably wounded the collective mind. Characteristic of authoritarian regimes is the establishment of control mechanisms, censorship, propaganda, control of the media, the creation of a complex bureaucratic web that acts as a cog in the wheel, and the loss of individual identity, with the individual becoming a mass controlled by fear (Arendt 1973 [1951]). A rich literary production influenced by the events that shook the 20th century stood on the ramparts in the face of a global phenomenon that dramatically changed the world and taught humanity that politics is not a luxury for the few, but the right and privilege of all people. From Aldous Huxley to George Orwell and Hannah Arendt, totalitarianism has been the subject of scholarly study and a literary theme.

Video games, especially those based on storytelling, could not be unaffected by this global phenomenon (Johnson, Tulloch 2017). At the dawn of the 1980s, a simulation game set in a dystopian society appeared, influenced by the Kafkaesque universe. *The Prisoner* takes players into a world where individuality has been abolished in a technologically controlled society. The main character is an undercover agent who has quit his job and been kidnapped to an island from which he is struggling to escape. The authorities on the island make his life difficult and use any means to distract him from his attempt to win back his freedom. Another, more contemporary, take on literature and a critique of totalitarianism is the adventure game, *Animal Farm*. Based on George Orwell's book, the story is an allegory through which the main ideas of the book come to the surface and challenge players to design a farm where all the animals, who have overthrown the status of their owners, will live together as equals. The players in this choice-driven game decide how to run the farm for the animals' best interest.

Beholder[1] is part of a larger series of indie games that sets their plot in a dystopian world that bears similarities to 1980s East Germany, or a society of the former Eastern Bloc, developing a thread both with history and with the

genre they belong to. The designers themselves admit to being influenced by literature in the creation of this particular game[2], which was preceded by *Papers Please*, another indie game about a border inspector whose job is to certify or reject the travel documents of various individuals passing in and out of Arstotzka, a fictional nation modeled on the communist dictatorships of the 20th century Eastern Bloc (Morrissette 2017). The influence of *Beholder's* designers on this game is evidenced by the fact that they dedicate the name *Papers Please* to a task whose purpose is to get a tenant out of the country.

In *Beholder*, an adventure game where the story plays an essential role (Katsaridou 2016), we are transferred to a dystopian society, set in 1984, where a family man named Carl Stein is appointed by the regime as the manager of an apartment building, tasked with spying on the tenants and reporting anything that might pose a threat to the state. The goal of the game, which is not visible from the beginning, is the survival of Carl and his family and their safe escape from the country. The game features multiple endings and each mission can unlock numerous subplots depending on the degree of interaction between the main character and the satellite characters (Aarseth 2012). The decisions made by the players, who exclusively manipulate Carl, do not always lead to the desired outcome. A good deed does not lead to a good end and vice versa. This creates a dynamic plot, with deep immersion, in a universe where everything is fluid (Ryan 2008).

Dystopia and totalitarianism are therefore central themes of the narrative which are not limited to the aesthetic aspect of the game (Johnson, Tulloch 2017). The key strands of analysis in order to highlight how totalitarianism is semantically shaped in *Beholder* are the examination of the semiotic systems that semantically dominate the introductory cutscene, the semiotic role of space in relation to the interface and how all of the above contribute to a particular style of playfulness in relation to plot and narrative (Ryan 2008; Knoller 2010; Aarseth 2012; Mason 2013; Katsaridou 2016).

2. Theoretical framework

The introductory cutscene, through semiotics' analytical point of view, is understood as a "text", a culturally shaped assemblage of signs (Chandler 2007). The game as a cultural product falls within the plethora of narrative representations of dystopia and totalitarianism, as we have shown earlier, and can therefore be approached with the available tools offered by previous research on literary texts and especially by contemporary research on interactive storytelling (Koenitz et al. 2013). Based on Lotman's view that "a text has the capacity to preserve the memory of its previous contexts" (Lotman 1990: 18), we can safely assert that the introductory cutscene incorporates all previous representations of totalitarianism, thus forming a

thread in artistic production through the process of semiosis. Recognising the thread that connects the cultural representations of totalitarianism, we can assume the commonly recognisable repertoire of signs and symbols exploited by the developers in the introductory cutscene and, more generally, the way in which *Beholder's* bleak world is semantically constructed.

Space in *Beholder* is considered an architectural structure, a real space, in which elements that make up the game's semiosphere are rendered. By analogy to biosphere, semiosphere is the imaginary space where communication takes place through semiosis (Lotman 1990). The semiotic space of *Beholder*, technically defined by the interface, is identified with the boundaries of the culture and society of the imaginary world of the game, i.e., it constitutes the semiosphere, which is shaped by the types of interaction, the various meanings, and the physical spatial boundaries within which the characters move or are confined. Questions about the ways of limitation and physical boundaries in the space of *Beholder* need to be answered in order to understand the ways in which spatialization intertwines with plot (Lagopoulos, Boklund 2014). Consequently, an interdisciplinary theoretical framework is inevitably formed which attempts a dynamic semiotic reading of the game as a politically and socially shaped text.

3. Semiotics of audio-visual narrative

The introduction to *Beholder's* semiosphere uses the cinematic-influenced cutscene to establish the background storyline that unfolds during the game and introduces the main character and his family to the players (King, Krzywinska 2002). Through the synergy of different semiotic systems such as image, music, text, and spoken language, a rich narrative text is constructed that introduces players to the story (Zantides 2018). In the black and white opening cutscene[3], lasting one minute and fifty-eight seconds (1:58), with its evocative music and numerous dystopian connotations, we follow the journey of the main character, Carl Stein, and his family to their new residence, where Carl has been appointed by the government as the new landlord. The cutscene is dominated by the voice of the narrator, a representative of the ministry, who reads the letter delivered to Carl by the Ministry of Allocation as seen below:

> Dear Carl Stein,
> We are happy to announce you've been appointed a landlord of a Class D apartment block on Kruchvice 6. You must arrive there immediately and start working. You and your family are given an apartment on the first floor. The experimental medicine you've been injected with during the medical checkout suppresses your need for sleep. Thus, you will be able to spend more time serving your motherland. Welcome to the elite official rank.
> Ministry of Allocation[4]

Totalitarianism dominates the game from the beginning and is imposed by

every means. For the letter addressed to the main character we identify three ways in which totalitarianism is semantically marked: a) the identification of the country with the government in power, b) the distortion of reality regarding the nature of the main character's work, and c) the power over people's lives and health. The identification of the homeland with the government in power is highlighted through the phrase "serving your motherland". This phrase implies that Carl's services as a state-appointed administrator will work for the benefit, not just of the state, but of the entire country. Carl's work, in other words, goes far beyond a typical job requiring management duties, thereby taking on the characteristics of a national purpose. The distortion of the truth is shown at the point where the Ministry conceals the true nature of Carl's work. Soon, he – along with the players – discovers that the services of the Kruchvice Street apartment building include spying on the lives of the residents, recording all kinds of suspicious activity, and reporting those deemed dangerous by the regime. Finally, the power that the regime exercises over people's lives is shown by the medical intervention that has been carried out on Carl's body by administering a substance that keeps him awake so that he can work as much as possible for the regime. The nature of totalitarianism is brought out in its entirety through the keen vigilance of those who serve the regime – the watchful eye of power that sees all and hears all.

Another semiotic trick that highlights the importance of the homeland is underlined semantically through the double message of the poster in the introductory cutscene (Figure 1). The poster depicts an officer pointing in one direction, with war planes and tanks above and below his face. The meaning of the verbal sign is likely interpreted as "For the Fatherland", with "Fo" being an alternative spelling of the English "For". However, "Fo", in military English terminology, also functions as an acronym for "Field Order".

Fig. 1 Introductory cutscene: the poster (Source: YouTube)

If we accept this interpretation, then the meaning of the poster is none other than what we would call "Code name: Fatherland", meaning that Carl is charged with a single mission: to serve his country. In light of this, the pictured officer in the visual message is also essentially pointing metonymically the way to the completion of the task.

It would perhaps be risky, but we cannot overlook the connotations of this particular sign and its connection with the famous statue of Lenin in Brest, Belarus. Considering the era in which the game is set, the 1980s, the extensive use of German surnames[5] with references to East Germany (DDR[6]), as well as place names that allude to totalitarianism, such as Borea, a country to which Carl's son wants to travel, with a direct reference to communist North Korea, it is safe to argue that the Russian designers of a socio-political game, who are very fluent with symbolism, are influenced not only by the European literary heritage, but also by the political and military history that has defined the modern world.

Concluding the discussion on the semantics of the introductory cutscene the case of *Beholder* comes to highlight the essential contribution of audiovisual narrative in creating what Squire calls an "emotionally compelling context for the player" (Squire 2008: 11). Often the cinematically influenced audiovisual representation of the story is perceived as the non-interactive element of the game or as a method of limiting the user's initiative, especially when it takes a significant share in the development of the plot, inhibiting immersion (Jenkins 2004). However, according to Mason immersion can also occur independently of the narrative and the type of interactivity (Mason 2013: 27). Therefore, immersion cannot be the only dimension for critiquing mediated cinematic-type scenes. Many researchers bring to the surface the multidimensional functionality of cutscenes (Klajver 2002). Indeed, the preceding examination has shown that the introductory cutscene through its variety of semiotic resources transports players from the real world to the imaginary world of the game, fostering immersion with a catalytic immediacy that could not otherwise be achieved. In other words, Beholder's introductory cutscene realises the designers" programmatic statement about the genre of the story and the dominant semantic universe in which the players will move and act.

4. Semiotics of space

The semiotic space in Beholder is identified as the real territorial space and the boundaries of the interface within which action takes place as shown in Figure 2. In this section we will describe the territorial features and attempt a semiotic analysis of the boundaries of Beholder's semiosphere, based on Lotman's thinking about the features that define the semiosphere (Lotman 1990)[7]. We

distinguish two levels in which there is a strong semiotic activity: the level of the apartment building, which is a sub-semiosphere in relation to the city, and the broader level of the world within which the micro-community of Kruchvice Street, the players' interface, falls.

In the first level, the road Kruchvice 6, on which the building is located is the imaginary axis that separates the action in the interface from what is happening in the outside world, to which the players have no access. With the street being a horizontal axis, the building is divided vertically. Below the street is the basement which contains, from right to left, the following: Carl's office, where he writes his reports and telephones the ministry; Carl's apartment, where he lives with his family; and two shared areas to which all residents have access: the kitchen and the laundry room. Above the street, the three floors of the building contain the tenants" apartments and extend up to the roof terrace.

Fig. 2. Semiotic space of the interface (Source: MobyGames)

A further semiotic division of space is that between the communal spaces and private spaces relating to the apartments. The door acts as a boundary between the privacy that characterises one's personal space and the action in the communal spaces of the building. Players can select the magnifying glass on the door of each apartment and spy on the activity of the residents. In this way they have a full view of the interior of an apartment, with the result that access through the magnifying glass removes the role of the door as a boundary and privacy remaining an illusion in the minds of the residents.

But Kruchvice, a public street, does not only function as an architectural division of the interface. Often when the tenants, who have a narrative program that unfolds alongside the main plot, return from their shift in the city, a question mark (quest) appears above their heads, indicating that there is the possibility of player interaction to develop the plot. It can be argued that

tenants become agents of the public with *Beholder's* exterior space penetrating the sub-semiosphere of the neighbourhood through the fluid boundaries of continuous transit.

Thus, the most obvious distinction of *Beholder's* semiotic space is that of the apartment versus the city. The phenomenon of fluid privacy highlighted earlier is reinforced by the constant arrival of external forces on the scene, such as anti- authoritarians acting behind the scenes, riots, and moving tenants. All these forces come from the periphery of the sub-semiosphere of the neighbourhood, merging into Kruchvice Street, the core of the action. Kruchvice is, in other words, a crossroads with fluid borders, defined by its lack of normality, but also by its constant dialectic with the wider *Beholder* society. A characteristic example of the dialectic with the external world and the coexistence of different voices can be found at the level of textuality in the news that regularly arrives in the mailbox. On the front page of the newspaper is the official state version of an event, while on the back page there is the anti-state counter- argument, an accusatory discourse (see Fig. 3). This fusion of different voices goes beyond the boundaries of playfulness and echoes the gloom that is fostered in the atmosphere of the game and the dominance of propaganda.

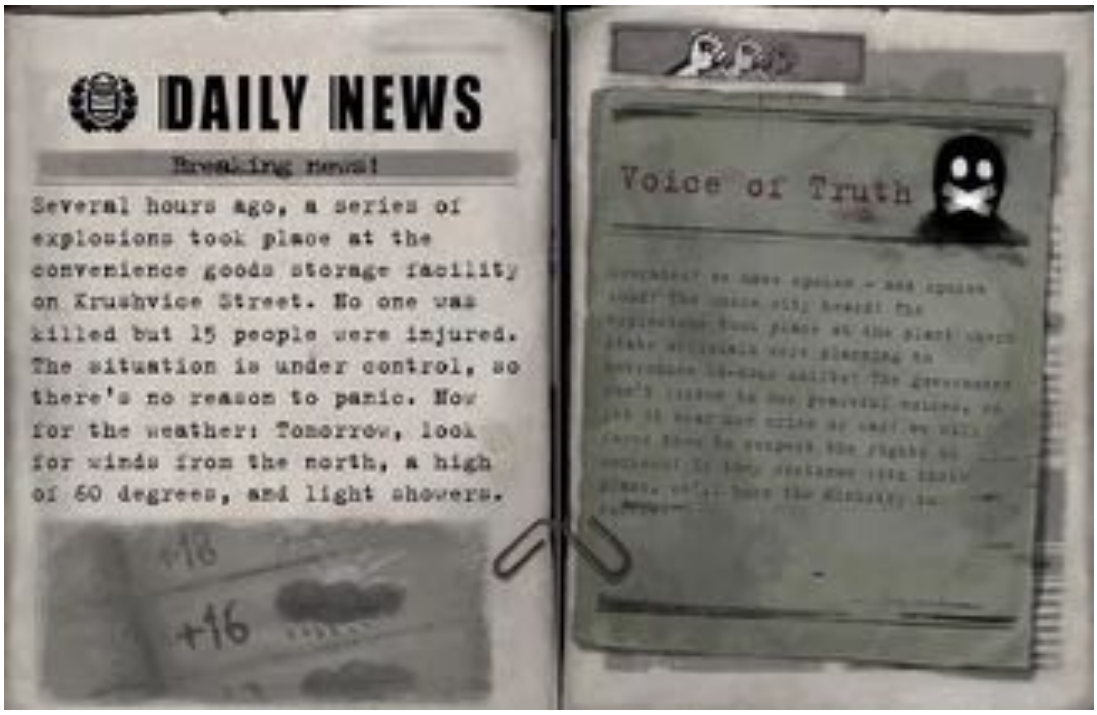

Fig. 3. Fusion of boundaries (the two sides of the newspaper)

At the broader level, between life in the city and the outside world, the distinction is less blurred, but equally contradictory. You either survive and live free or you die. Any attempt to escape the city or the country seems either utopian and therefore not pursued by the characters or dreamlike and remains in the realm of the desirable. The plot unfolds either one way or the other

depending on the decisions of the players and in the case of the main character marks the respective different endings.

5. Interface, style of playfulness, and absurdity

In addition to spying on tenants, players can also interact with objects to achieve the goals of the game. Objects are divided into two categories: a) those that provide useful information about the tenant's profile, mainly related to a hobby, e.g., a cookbook, a tennis racket, etc. and b) illegal items[8]. The discovery of an illegal item can be used in two ways: a) to denounce the tenant to the state or b) to blackmail the tenant with a financial benefit for the main character. Money is a key element for the completion of missions and its acquisition becomes an end in itself for survival in the game. The preparation of each type of report is carried out by Carl in his office. By successfully completing a report on each tenant's profile, the main character receives a minimal amount of money from the government as a reward.

Fig. 4. Workplace's interface and Government directives (Source: True Achievements)

These features provided by the interface can largely be applied throughout the game. However, access to these tools creates the illusion that they are sufficient to solve most of the missions. This is a typical case of what has been called pseudo-agency (Smed et al. 2019: 57). Unlimited action paradoxically corresponds to a limited impact on the story plot, which cannot be fully unfolded without interaction with the satellites.

Interaction takes place through predetermined task-based dialogues

that provide useful information for decision making (Cavazza, Charles 2005: 22) or through designed dialogues with meaningful relevance to the textual genre favouring information gathering. However, the agency, as it was previously shown, is rather limited, favouring more the story that is designed to be told, as often decisions that at a given moment seemed reasonable to the interactants, later collide with an undesirable outcome and are reassessed retrospectively (Knoller 2010: 267). The path to be followed is therefore highly fluid and is constantly redefined through the agency developed by the interactant.

Where will priority be given? Will Carl pay his son's tuition fees or risk him being expelled from the university or pay the doctor who has to provide hard-to-find medicines for Carl's sick daughter? Will Carl give in to the threats of the anti-regime movement and help or will he continue to serve the government? Will he turn in the one who is acting suspiciously, or will he help him once he learns his tragic story? Such dilemmas co-exist within the game and often force players to make decisions different from their wishes, given the suffocating pressure of time, as many missions must be completed within a certain time frame. Failure to complete them has consequences that in turn affect the plot. Thus, each decision is closely linked to the production of meaning and intensifies the commitment of the players (Tanenbaum, Tanenbaum 2010).

The options available in the interactants are not visible from the outset and only through trial-and-error can one gain the necessary knowledge to know what to avoid and what to choose according to the target. We suggest, therefore, that what the Tanenbaums call the „illusion of agency" is not based solely on mechanics, but is rather a deliberate choice by designers about the kind of playfulness they want to create in relation to the world they want to represent (ibid, 13). This sense of infinite trial and error gives the game its characteristic difficulty and sense of absurdity, but also the charm of replayability, as each visit is different from the previous one (Ryan 2008). This leads us to the conclusion that pleasure and fun are sacrificed on the altar of replayability and the bleakness of the universe of totalitarianism, a world that for the designers is treated as a dead end, with the autonomy of the subjects being only an illusion.

In the end, it makes no difference whether the regime managed to stay in power or was overthrown by the revolutionary movement, as the path to dystopia has transformed the players in such a way that catharsis – even if it results from the plot – is not enough to erase an experience of playfulness through illegitimate means and frustrations, practices synonymous with trying to survive in an absurd world. The designers, therefore, manage to create not just an adventure game, but rather an exciting simulation game of life in a dystopian society.

Conclusion

Through the semiotics" analytical point of view, we attempted to reconstruct the semantic universe of *Beholder*, focusing on the visual signs used in the introductory cutscene and the spatial characteristics of the game's semiosphere, namely the boundaries that distinguish the different levels of communication and action.

Through the process of semiosis, totalitarianism is presented as a social phenomenon, situated in a neighbourhood that affects people's lives. The story is invested with a plethora of symbols that constitute the totalitarian identity of the society in which the action takes place, such as the illusion of freedom, state control, harsh prohibitions, miserable living conditions, work that amounts to serving the national interest, an invisible state apparatus, the control of media and propaganda. These meanings are encoded through speech, image, behaviour and finally the aesthetics of the game including graphics, interface structure and audiovisual texts.

The fluid boundaries between public and private are a key feature of *Beholder's* semiosphere and were mainly found at two levels: a) at the level of textuality, in the case of news, with articles functioning as conflicting voices that create a climate of questioning the truth, which favours a lack of trust towards any official or unofficial voice and b) at the level of the interface, with the function of the apartment door as a separator between the public and the private space being abolished.

Such a gaming experience can be seen from many stances. One is the didactic, as the game immerses players in a world that in our time seems like a nightmare, a world in which no one would want to live or relive. The other is the side of narrative charm, as it draws players into a story that leaves no one unaffected, as if we were reading a well-written book. But beyond these two functional perspectives, it is important to bear in mind that these games are not neutral, in the sense that they reflect their era and the historical and political context in which the identity of their designers was shaped, and it is important not to overlook the socio-political dimension that characterises them. The thread that we have already identified from the beginning of this article between literature, the genre to which the game belongs, and the historical events of the 20th century is now, we believe, confirmed through the semiotic analysis of the narrative that we have attempted.

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Notes

1 *Beholder* is a Russian adventure game developed by Warm Lamp Games and published by Alawar Entertainment. It was released on November 9, 2016 on Steam.

2 "Beholder is inspired by dystopian works of George Orwell, Aldous Huxley and Ray Bradbury" (Source: https://beholder.fandom.com/wiki/Beholder).

3 For the discussion about opening cinematics see Dickey 2006; Klevjer 2002; King; Krzywinska 2002; Hancock 2002 and Gibbons 2010.

4 Transcribed by the author.

5 Stein, Zauer, Schimmer, Wattermach, Meineke, Walner, Brukich are some of the surnames of the satellite characters.

6 Deutsche Demokratische Republik.

7 "even more crucial is the unifying factor of the boundary, which divides the internal space of the semiosphere from the external, its inside from its outside" (Lotman 1990: 130).

8 The government issues directives on a daily basis for activities, objects and practices that are recognized as illegal and are prohibited by the regime (e.g., possessing foreign currency, the production of political propaganda, crying, war talk, reading books).

AN OVERVIEW OF FAN PRODUCTION AND PARTICIPATORY CULTRE in the digital age

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Abstract. Participatory culture has triggered a process of change in the relationship between the text and the reader. There has been a surge in the amount of fan-produced texts which circulate on the Internet, a space marked by the collective participation of individuals, and where the old communicational boundaries between production and reception are increasingly blurred. Given this scenario, the present article consists of a literature review on the topic of participatory culture, accounting for epistemological changes in the field, and shedding light upon the cultural practices and meaning-making mechanisms involved in fan production. It is also this work's objective to raise methodological questions on how one can analyse fan production in the context of participatory culture as it is conceptualised today. It is understood that, given the complexities surrounding cyberculture and its inherent characteristics, the meanings of both audience and production are continually re-signified. Furthermore, fan production can be interpreted as being part of the mechanisms of the memory and autocommunication of a culture since it is based on the reproduction and transformation of cultural texts. Thus, the role of the semiotics of culture in the analysability of fan production in the context of cyber- and participatory cultures is emphasised in this text.

Keywords: cyberculture, participatory culture, fan production, culture studies, literature review

Ülevaade fännitootmisest ja osaluskultuurist digiajastul

Abstrakt. Osaluskultuur on käivitanud teksti ja lugeja suhete muutumise protsessi. Fännide poolt toodetud tekstide hulk, mis ringleb Internetis, on kasvanud inimeste kollektiivse osaluse kaudu, kus vanad suhtluspiirid tootmise ja vastuvõtu vahel hägustuvad üha enam. Seda stsenaariumi arvestades koosneb käesolev artikkel kirjanduse ülevaatest osaluskultuuri teemal, võttes arvesse valdkonna epistemoloogilisi muutusi ning valgustades fännide tootmisega seotud kultuuripraktikaid ja tähenduse loomise mehhanisme. Samuti on selle töö eesmärk tõstatada metodoloogilisi küsimusi selle kohta, kuidas analüüsida fännitootmist osaluskultuuri kontekstis, nagu seda tänapäeval mõistetakse. Arvestades

küberkultuuri ümbritsevat keerukust ja selle loomupäraseid omadusi, mõistetakse nii publiku kui ka produktsiooni tähendusi pidevalt ümber. Lisaks võib fännitootmist tõlgendada osana kultuuri mälu ja autokommunikatsiooni mehhanismidest, kuna see põhineb kultuuritekstide reprodutseerimisel ja ümberkujundamisel. Seega rõhutatakse siin kultuurisemiootika rolli fännitootmise analüüsitavuses küber- ja osaluskultuuride kontekstis.

Märksõnad: küberkultuur, osaluskultuur, fännitootmine, kultuuriuuringud, kirjanduse ülevaade

Una Visión General de la Producción de los Fans y la Cultura Participativa en la Era Digital

Resumen. La cultura participativa ha desencadenado un proceso de cambio en la relación entre texto y el lector. Ha aumentado la cantidad de textos producidos por fans que circulan por Internet, un espacio marcado por la participación colectiva de los individuos, donde los antiguos límites comunicacionales entre producción y recepción son cada vez más difusos. Ante este escenario, el presente artículo consiste en una revisión bibliográfica sobre el tema de la cibercultura, dando cuenta de los cambios epistemológicos en el campo, y arrojando luz sobre las prácticas culturales y los mecanismos de creación de significado involucrados en la producción de los fans. También es un objetivo de este trabajo plantear cuestiones metodológicas sobre cómo se puede analizar la producción de los fans en el contexto de la cultura participativa tal y como se conceptualiza hoy en día. Se entiende que, dadas las complejidades que rodean a la cibercultura y sus características inherentes, los significados tanto del público como de la producción se resignifican continuamente. Por lo tanto, corresponde al investigador que indaga los procesos de creación de significados en el contexto digital de la comunicación considerar metodologías y teorías basadas en su objeto, de manera ad hoc, ya que la producción de los fans parece dictar su propia analizabilidad.

Palabras clave: cyber cultura, cultura participativa, fan production, estudios culturales, revision literaria

Introduction

Since the turn of the millennium, authors have agreed (Lévy 2001; Murray 2017; Jenkins 2006; Scolari 2009) that significant changes in communicative practices, modes of production, circulation, and consumption of cultural products, within the perspective of media convergence have occurred (Jenkins 2004), which has inserted the world into the transmedia era.

In this context, it is possible to see the emergence of a culture guided by the collective participation of individuals, where the boundaries between production and reception are increasingly diffuse, highlighting the empowered, productive, creative, and socialised consumer (Jenkins 1992). In the last two decades, new modes of production built from the coordinated use of different media seek to establish immersive universes, on the threshold between fictional

and non-fictional, with the purpose of engaging consumers, involving them in interactive and collaborative actions (Piva, Affini 2017).

New technologies provided an expansion of the limits of interpret fictional narrative content, which presupposes innovation and a change in the technical basis for dynamically supporting communicative processes (Murray 2017). Such changes emphasise the role of communication as a fundamental contributor to profound cultural transformations and in the organisation of society.

As such, the study of audio-visual language and processes of meaning-making in the digital context of communication, as well as in the aesthetic and sociocultural scopes, has been of increasingly greater importance, as we move further into the digital age. Given this ever-growing relevance, the present article aims to compile a comparative historical literature review on the topic of cyber- and participatory cultures, accounting for epistemological changes in the field, as well as raising some methodological problems that might emerge in this scenario. It is also the objective to shed light upon the cultural practice of fan production and how one can analyse said products in the context of participatory culture as it is conceptualised today.

This article is organised in three main chapters, namely:

- A discussion on how cyberculture enables participatory culture, of which fan production is a main characteristic.
- Issues pertaining to the analysability of fan production.
- A general overview of meaning-making mechanisms in participatory culture.

Furthermore, before diving into these matters, some distinctions might be useful for a better understanding of the main ideas underlying this paper. Cyberspace is here understood as the "medium of communication that arose through the global interconnection of computers. The term refers not only to the material infrastructure of digital communications but to the oceanic universe of information it holds, as well as the human beings who navigate and nourish that infrastructure" (Lévy 2001: xvi). Along the same lines, "[c]yberculture is the set of technologies (material and intellectual), practices, attitudes, modes of thought, and values that developed along with the growth of cyberspace" (Lévy 2001: xvi).

The notion of participatory culture used in this paper is the same one as described in the works of Jenkins (1992; 1994) as, basically, a productive, creative, and collaborative culture that allows free expression of artistic talent, and social engagement as well as the sharing of creations with others. In this context, the concept of fan production is intricately tied to Jenkin's view of a 'fan' as being a person who translates the reading of a text into "some kind of cultural activity, by sharing feelings and thoughts [...], by joining a "community" of other fans who share common interests. For fans, consumption naturally

sparks production, reading generates writing" (Jenkins 1994: 49). Having established this basic terminology, the discussion may proceed.

1. Cyberculture as that which enables the expansion of participatory culture

Lévy (2001: ix) states that "the growth of cyberspace is the result of an international movement of young people eager to experiment collectively with forms of communication other than those provided by traditional media". It is possible to argue that this statement is outdated due to the fact that it was made more than two decades ago and, therefore, does not consider the presence of large conglomerates such as Google and Meta (Facebook), for instance, whose presence on the Internet is incisive. Nevertheless, Lévy's statement reveals the beginning of the overcoming of the old collective dimensions of mass culture from the previous millennium, a culture that was written by a somewhat individual intelligence and perpetuated the concepts of the author and the closed text. In new media, popular culture emerged as something more supportive of collective intelligence, as a new economy of narratives and representations (Vilches 2003: 158).

Given this collective character inherent to cyberculture, the strength that the act of sharing has gained within networks is emphasised, thus giving greater capability to participatory culture (Jenkins 1992). After all, according to Jenkins (2006: 193), the creation process "is much more fun and meaningful if you can share what you can create with others". Although the increasing monopoly of the network by conglomerates such as Meta, Google, and other social media platforms cannot be ignored, the Internet still provides a determining infrastructure for the sharing of the productions of anyone who wants to produce something at home. As such, a characteristic of digital media is to provide a different type of interaction than mass media. Even though some of what is produced in digital media can still be characterised as mass media, in terms of media materiality, digital media is grounded on communication from many-to-many, whilst traditional mass media works on the basis of a communication from one-to-many. Therefore, cyberculture provides a crucial infrastructure for the sharing of fan productions that guide participatory studies, a network-shaped communication (Piva, Affini 2017: 155).

The collective participation of individuals, which seems to be discussed in almost all communicational studies post-2000s, is configured within the network as exchanges between subjects. For Machado (2007: 230), "in addition to multiplying, the subject who navigates in virtual space comes into contact with other virtual subjects, their counterparts in cyberspace, with whom they will carry out intersubjective exchanges"[1]. In this sense, the

traditional opposition between the individual and the collective begins to change, so that unprecedented forms of previous identities are manifested.

Both in new media and in the still present traditional mass media, the consumption of products is part of the construction of the public sphere and configures an experience of interaction between subjects who engage with the same content (Cannito 2010: 20). Thus, even if a media product is considered to be extremely niche, there will always be a community character in relation to those who engage with it, as a collective of individuals whose shared interests provide the basis for a sense of belonging within a certain group.

These groups of individuals united by the affection for a media product can be called a fandom, a phenomenon that, despite having emerged before the age of networks, gained power with the ease of sharing provided by the technological and cultural scenario of cyberculture. In the early days of participatory culture, when visibility costs were high, subjects who wrote fan fiction, organised conventions, and produced fan-to-fan material had difficulty finding others with whom to share their interests (Shirky 2011). On the other hand, in a world where visibility costs are low due to the interconnection characteristic of cyberculture, people who are dedicated to certain activities can meet and interact more easily (ibid). In this way, fandom becomes a representative manifestation of participatory culture, as it is not only related to the individual behaviour of a fan, but rather to the collective experience of media consumption around a certain object, where sharing is a fundamental part of the cultural experience (Jenkins 1992).

At the same time, being part of a community or a fandom requires continuous and thorough dedication, something which those who do not belong in the community do not always understand (Shirky 2011). The vision of Lévy (2001), which is utopian to a considerable extent, states that cyberspace implies recognition, acceptance, cooperation, and association of the other, in a movement that goes beyond differences of interest, enabling peaceful and friendly contact for the transmission of knowledge around the world. Despite permitting these advances proposed by Lévy, cyberculture, understood as a complex system, also brought with it hate-mail, cyberbullying, cancel culture, and other practices related to intolerance, a side effect of the act of becoming a public person on the network.

For Clay Shirky (2011), 'becoming public' is understood as a strategy for the subject to find, primarily, people who think alike. This strategy has resulted in an increase, as never before witnessed, in the amount of material produced by fans for fans, or, as the author puts it, a "material that is available to the public but not intended for the public — its creators are looking not to reach some generic audience but rather to communicate with their soul mates, often within a sense of shared cultural norms that differ from those of the outside world" (ibid: 66). One could also approach this sort of material (text) through Eco's notion of the Model Reader (Eco 1979). Fan production can be understood as something whose Model Reader is its fandom, composed by

those who are able to recognise and observe the rules laid out by the text, and are eager to play by these rules. Even though practices such as hate-mail, cyberbullying, and cancelling are a result of this publicity provided by the networks, before being induced by behaviours of repression and prejudice, fandoms are awakened from the desire to feel as being part of a community composed of individuals who appreciate and are willing to get involved with the same playful universe (Jenkins 1992).

In the field of fan production, there is a wide range of this sort of material mentioned by Shirky, that are produced on a non-profit basis, for the satisfaction of the fan community, namely: wikis, online collaborative thematic encyclopaedias; fan videos, amateur videos distributed through platforms such as YouTube; fan fiction, written texts of narrative character; fan arts, artistic pieces ranging from paintings to photo montages, small animations in graphics interchange format (.gif), and artistic representations of quotes from character speeches (Piva, Affini 2017: 153).

Given the complexity of how participatory culture is organised, its origins, how it changed in the last decades, and the many characteristics of its products, a question arises as to how fan production can be analysed and on which terms.

2. Fan production analysability

For Peeter Torop (2006), a scientific analysis will always configure one single approach to culture, amongst many other possibilities, in a way that "the study of one and the same culture gives rise to numerous and different views and snapshots of that culture, and the analysis of culture as a fragmented object of study becomes the analysis of cultures" (ibid, 286). As such, the analysis of participatory culture and its products are no exemption. It becomes clear that "the plurality of the scientific research methods is complementary to the plurality of culture as a complex object of study" (ibid).

Thus, one way of analysing fan production is as belonging to a category of creative act that is relatively different from that occupied by those who hold the rights over media products. As an example, Shirky (2011) wrote about the difference between J. K. Rowling's books, and the fan fiction written by her fans. For Shirky, Rowling inhabits a different world from that of her fans: the world of money, in which creators are paid for their productions. Meanwhile, fan fiction authors prefer to work in the world of affection, where the goal is recognition within the fan community of the fictional universe to which they belong (or, as I also understand, plainly for self-satisfaction). Nevertheless, this view from Shirky leads to some questionable conclusions, such as the supposition that authors who inhabit this 'world of money' and create so-called 'original productions', do not work for affection or recognition of their fans, which is not true. Besides, it is well-known that fan work can and is nowadays

also rewarded through monetary transactions, especially in the realm of fan art, where visual artists are often commissioned for the creation of fan content.

In this sense, it seems it is difficult to disassociate fan production from the problem of authorship, which dates back to the pre-digital age. In *Death of the Author*, Roland Barthes (1977) liberates the literary work from authorial-intention and control, leading to the decentralisation of the notion of authorship. For Barthes, the reading process dismantles the supposed unity and coherence of a text, which then explodes into multiple meanings. A reader is as much a function of the text as is the author, but perhaps what is more important is that the reader is a text's 'destination'. Although Barthes was referring to the literary work, his ideas can be transposed to the context of fan production of all sorts, raising many interesting questions, such as: is the notion of the author still applicable to so-called 'official' productions?

Some authors would like to do away with this question altogether by stating that "[t]here is a distinction between playing a creative role within an authored environment and having authorship of the environment itself" (Murray 2017: 152). In the aforementioned excerpt, Murray is addressing, specifically, the issue of authorship within interactive narratives for computers, where, according to her, the 'true author' of the narrative is the game programmer. However, it is permissible to extend this concept to talk about any other narrative and the fan productions that arise from them. After all, it is established by Umberto Eco's theory of textual cooperation (Eco 1979) that every narrative is, to some degree, interactive in the sense that it requires the reader to exercise semiotic judgment, actively participating in the processes of interpretation and meaning-making. Therefore, when an author of fan fiction, as well as the producer of any other category of fan production, operates within the limits of the narrative universe and rules created by its original author, this fan must be understood as an interactor, because it is not a phenomenon of authorship, but rather of agency (Murray 2017: 153).

This view proposed by Murray, as well as the one by Shirky are still centralised around the notion of authorship that a reading of Barthes could easily dismantle. Nevertheless, it is still interesting to consider Murray's ideas surrounding the concept of immersion and how we could relate it to participatory culture.

Fan production, as understood in this sense, contributes to the immersion of subjects in a fictional narrative through, for example, analytical writings for fanzines/blogs, which investigate the underlying assumptions of a certain fictional world. This type of behaviour (producing content related to the virtual universe) is favoured for the level of complexity and detail involved in the creation of the original work by its creator. Encyclopaedic writers such as George R. R. Martin (author of *A Song of Ice and Fire*, base-text for the television show *Game of Thrones*) awaken this type of production from their fans due to the massive detailing of their narration, which invites the subject to participate on the fictional world (Murray 2017). In this way, it is understood

that the phenomenon of immersion is closely related to the level of detail in the creation of the narrative universe, which is not to say that this is the only characteristic that provides for immersion, since the storyworld is but one aspect of a text.

The interaction with a narrative universe is, however, just as important as the interaction with the narrative itself. In other words, immersion arises in the course of relating oneself, not only to the universe, but also to the story. Regarding this interaction, Jenkins (2006: 247) writes about "a balance between fascination and frustration: if media content didn't fascinate us, there would be no desire to engage with it; but if it didn't frustrate us on some level, there would be no drive to rewrite or remake it". It is in this latter sense that I would like to highlight the creative processes in which fans do not submit to the rules and limits created by the original author of the product. For those who go beyond what the author of the original work created and operate using transgressive logics, the discussion must be different.

Perhaps it is necessary to search for the origins and explanations of what makes a 'fan' in the first place, besides the quick definition offered in the introduction of this paper. Fiske (1992: 46) states that "the fan is an 'excessive reader' who differs from the 'ordinary' one in degree rather than kind". In other words, the fan consumer differs from the common consumer based on their degree of involvement with the original narrative, in such a way that, while the common consumer thinks and imagines, the fan produces. In the decade of 1980, in his book *The Third Wave*, Toffler (1980) coined the term 'prosumption', generated from the expression 'production by consumers'. From that, the term 'prosumer' emerged to designate this 'consumer-producer', the fan who produces from their appropriation of the original text.

Furthermore, fans tend to reread or rewatch their favourite archived content, accumulating more and more knowledge about fictional universes, which is also synonymous with prestige within a social group made up of other fans (Piva, Affini 2017). A fan's commitment to a narrative extends beyond the text consumption period; it is greater than the airtime of an episode of a television show, or the number of pages in a book, as the fan joins fan clubs and fan societies, participates in conventions, engages with, and produces new texts related to the original product.

In this fashion, it is relevant, when discussing fan production, to think about the concept of virtuality, as written by Deleuze (1994). The scholar reflected on the existence of a series of virtual realities, possibilities, or potentialities that exist at the same time as canonical realities. While the canonical is what is happening, the virtual is what could happen at any time. This notion can be associated to what Eco (1979: 217) considers as 'possible worlds': "When one imagines a set of individuals (and of relations among them) that the text cannot finally admit, one in fact resorts to opposing to the world of the text a possible world not accessible to it". Eco writes that a text is not a possible world in itself, but "a machine for producing possible worlds" (ibid,

246), in a way that fan production can be understood as one of these possible worlds produced by the original text. In summary, the essence of some fan productions can, thus, only be found in the virtual, non-canonical[2] reality of the diegetic universe of a text.

So far, we have seen many varied frameworks and perspectives through which to look at fan production, and yet, I would like to highlight the possibilities offered by Lotmanian cultural semiotics. More than forty years ago, Lotman defined culture as the totality of non-hereditary information that is not only acquired and preserved, but also transmitted and transformed by societal groups (Lotman 1977) or, even more simply, a 'collective memory' (Lotman and Uspensky 1978). In the semiotics of culture, this concept of cultural memory is central to both the functioning and the continuity of culture itself. In their article bridging cultural semiotics with transmedia studies, Ojamaa and Torop (2014: 63-65) discuss how memory is fundamentally linked to the notion of repetition with variation. For the authors, "[r]epetition is a process and an entity that simultaneously underlines sameness and difference between the new text and the previous one" (ibid, 63). Furthermore:

> texts, text fragments, meanings that are considered important from the point of view of a community's identity are repeated not only in the natural language, but in different sign systems of the same culture [...]. Therefore, the principle of repetition or iteration is important both from the point of view of textual construction and of culture as a whole. Repeating a story across different sign systems is culture's way of remembering and increasing the meaningfulness of a given text. (Ojamaa and Torop 2014: 63)

To such a degree, the survival of a culture depends on this continuous repetition and transformation of texts and codes that endlessly feed into each other, while at the same time providing renewal. Along these lines, it is possible to say that fan production functions as part of this mechanism. It has been established that fan productions are ways of transforming texts and creating new ones, whilst still propagating the source-text, prolonging its life inside culture. Moreover, as Ojamaa and Torop (2014: 63) state: "the more diverse media are incorporated into the process of (re)translation, the stronger is the text-sign's or text's potential to survive". Given the fact that fan production occurs in a variety of media (wikis, fan videos, fan fiction, fan arts, and any other kind of fan production), it is possible to see how effective these texts can be as mechanisms of cultural memory, in the process of reproduction and transformation.

Finally, in this same line of thought, Ojamaa (2015: 33) writes: "in the process of transmedial repetition of a canonical text, not only the text is transformed but the cultural system itself is restructured by providing oneself with new ways of self-description". In this context, fan production may be analysed in terms of the degree with which a text is capable of enabling dialog with its surrounding culture. It is possible to say that the more fan productions can be found regarding a certain source-text, the more said text has been interpreted and mediated and so, the more active the dialogue between this

text and its cultural environment is (Ojamaa and Torop 2014: 65). Similarly, this process can also work the other way around: culture can be analysed in terms of its own capacity to dialog with a source-text. Thus, fan production, as understood as one way for a culture to practice self-description, appears to be an integral part of the process of autocommunication of culture, that is, of the communication of a culture with itself (ibid, 2014).

3. Meaning-making mechanisms in participatory culture

Meaning-making in storytelling is closely linked to the way in which a subject engages in an immersive way with a fictional narrative (Arsenault 2005). In other words, through the formulation of hypotheses about the outcome of the plot, character motivations, and other aspects of the story that need to be filled with the cooperation of the reader (Eco 1979), immersion takes place through the emotional projection of the subject in the events of the narrative through an empathetic relationship with the characters (Arsenault 2005).

Similarly, Jenkins (1992: 158) writes about the "on-going process of fan rereading", which results in a progressive elaboration of meanings about the fictional universe through inferences and speculations which go beyond the information conveyed explicitly in the original product. It is also possible to state, following this line of thought, that narrative is the basic mechanism for meaning-making, whether by an ordinary spectator or a fan, since every media product, even if it is not linguistic or even visual, is narratively structured (Scolari 2009).

Further, regarding meaning-making in cyberculture, Lévy (2001) writes about how it is still possible to read texts from hundreds of years ago, despite the loss of context surrounding such texts, due to a certain universality that arose from static writing. According to him, this 'totalizing' universality could only be constructed at the cost of a reduction or even a 'fixation' of meaning. In cyberculture, a new universality emerges that no longer depends on the self-sufficiency of texts, or the fixation of meanings. The reason for that is that it is a universality constructed and extended through the interconnection (intertextuality) of the messages within virtual communities, that give it varied meanings which are permanently renewed (Lévy 2001).

It is imperative for contemporary audio-visual and communication studies to understand that a fictional world or narrative is not, and could not be, a single text from which only a true meaning can be abstracted (Klastrup, Tosca 2004). The public is constantly not only in search of the understanding of what a media product means, but also aiming to generate a meaning connected to their own lives, experiences, and desires (Grossberg 1992). Thus, the same product has different meanings in different contexts, since all perceptual material depends on the subject's unique perception. As Machado (2007) puts it, the audio-visual spectator acts as a second screen, separate

from the first, where the sequence of narrative events is composed, gains meaning, and allows the projected imaginary to ascend to the symbolic field.

All cultural objects and, therefore, all new media objects are images, representations of elements existing in the real world, however virtual they may be. It does not matter if it is a website, a computer game, or a digital picture, any new media object can be understood both as a representation and as a contributor to the construction of an external reference (Manovich 2001).

In this context, immersive narratives of complex universes must be approached as trans-discursive entities and, at the same time, as imaginary constructions shared by the public (Klastrup, Tosca 2004). Access to media facilitates the process of generating images, however, it is not just a matter of accumulative production, that is, the greater generation of images. Instead, there are creative processes of sharing imaginaries (Leão 2011).

Much more can be said regarding meaning-making processes in participatory culture, especially from the point of view of the semiotics of culture (which has been merely introduced in the previous section). Suffice it to say, for the purposes of the present article, that despite the vastness of studies, there are still many gaps to be filled, and so, possibilities for research on this topic will not be exhausted any time soon.

Final remarks

Cyberspace enables the proliferation of non-canonical texts that make up the characteristic production profile of participatory culture (Jenkins 1992), which incorporates productive and socialised audiences. These fan-produced texts, which borrow from the media industry and rework pre-existing narratives, circulate on the Internet, a space marked by the collective participation of individuals, where the old communicational boundaries between production and reception are increasingly blurred.

Participatory culture has, thus, triggered a process of change in the relationship between product and public, text and reader. The network space allows for an expansion of the limits of creation, or even reinterpretation, of the content of fictional narratives. Production models from the decade of 2010 and forward seek to establish immersive universes, based on the coordinated use of different media, expanding the area of intersection between fiction and non-fiction to engage consumers, involving them in interactive and collaborative actions.

Therefore, it is important to understand that the relations between producer and audience can no longer be understood as the process by which subjects appropriate existing works in a context already constructed from their social positions and experiences, passively ascending to the predetermined nature of the media product (Grossberg 1992). On the contrary, the meanings of both audience and production are continually re-signified.

As this paper has hopefully displayed, the field of research on participatory culture has been growing ever since the 1990s, in a way that the amount of material one can find on the subject today is vast and often overlapping or even contradictory. It is possible to conclude from this quick overview, that there is an abundance of ways through which one can analyse fan production or understand participatory culture. Undoubtedly, these diverse methodologies might, at the same time, prove themselves to be both a hindrance and an advantage. On the one hand, a researcher will not find themselves lacking when it comes to content or theoretical framework. On the other, choosing what perspective to work from might be challenging given the vast amount of possible angles.

As a means of conclusion, this paper argues that semiotics as a discipline, being a historically transdisciplinary (cutting across linguistics, mathematics, cybernetics, logic, art, and cultural studies) is an adequate methodological tool to start from when it comes to the study of participatory culture and its productions. Notably, the semiotics of culture as founded by Lotman and carried out by the Tartu-Moscow School can surely provide new insights to this field (as it was already proved by the research carried out by Ojamaa 2015, on transmediality). The notions of cultural self-description, memory, and autocommunication, as introduced here, can contribute to new and deeper studies, warranting the attention of researchers aiming to investigate participatory culture.

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Notes

1 Translated by the author from the original in Portuguese: "*além de multiplicar-se, o sujeito que navega no espaço virtual entra em contato com outros sujeitos virtuais, seus homólogos no ciberespaço, com os quais vai realizar trocas intersubjetivas*" (Machado 2007: 230).

2 The term "canon", when used within fandom, has a different connotation from the one that is used here. Although fan-generated texts which follow official canon can be tagged as 'canonic' by a fan community, this essentially means canon-*compliant*. As such, fan production can be either canon-defiant or canon-compliant, but never truly canonic in the original sense of the word, that is, being officially part of the body of a work. Thus, the notions of canonical and non-canonical used in this paper are in this original sense (that which is or is not part of the official body of a work), and not in the sense of a fan production that can be understood as canon-compliant or canon-defiant within fandom.

ONG'S HAT and the construction of a suspicious model reader

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Abstract. In the late 1980s, an art collective led by writer Joseph Matheny created a multimedia narrative eventually known as *Ong's Hat* about a supposed group of scientists who had achieved interdimensional travel and a subsequent persecution and concealment by of a dark conspiracy. Unfolded through printed documents sent by post, BBS (bulletin board systems) and later blogs, videos and radio, the *Ong's Hat* textual complex managed to create a community of believers who discussed and amplified the narrative, appropriating it and disavowing its original creators. This article proposes to approach *Ong's Hat* through Umberto Eco's semiotics of interpretation, particularly his ideas on textual cooperation between reader and text and, starting from there, the textual strategies through which *Ong's Hat* created its Model Readers. For this, concepts linked to transmedia are used, as well as the methodology developed by Margrit Schreier to evaluate how certain texts manage to confuse their readers about their reality status.

Keywords: transmedia, interpretation, textual cooperation, textual strategies, Model Reader, BBS, ARG

"Ongi müts" ja kahtlustava mudellugeja loomine

Abstrakt. 1980. aastate lõpus lõi Joseph Matheny juhitud kunstirühmitus multimeedia narratiivi, mida hakati tundma "Ongi mütsi" nime all. See jutustas oletatavatest teadlastest, kes saavutasid interdimensionaalse rändevõime ning tumedast vandenõust, mis neid seejärel taga kiusas ja maha salgas. "Ongi mütsi" tekstuaalne kompleks rullus lahti läbi postiteel saadetud trükitud dokumentide, teadetetahvlisüsteemide (ingl k BBS) ning hiljem läbi blogide, videote ja raadio. Sellel õnnestus luua tõsiuskujate kogukond, kes arutlesid narratiivi üle ja võimendasid selle mõju, omastades selle ning öeldes lahti narratiivi esialgsetest loojatest. Käesolev artikkel pakub lähenemise "Ongi mütsile" Umberto Eco interpretatsioonisemiootika kaudu, kasutades tema ideeid lugeja ja teksti koostööst. Täpsemalt uuritakse tekstuaalseid strateegiaid, mille kaudu "Ongi müts" lõi enda mudellugejaid. Sellel eesmärgil kasutatakse transmeedia mõisteid, aga ka Margit Schreieri väljatöötatud metodoloogiat hindamaks, kuidas teatud tekstid on võimelised tekitama lugejates segadusse oma reaalsusestaatuse osas.

Märksõnad: transmeedia, interpretatsioon, tekstuaalne koostöö, tekstuaalsed strateegiad, mudellugeja, BBS, ARG

El sombrero de Ong y la construcción de un modelo de lector sospechoso

Resumen. A finales de la década de 1980, un colectivo de autores liderados por el escritor Joseph Matheny, creó una narrativa multimedia, eventualmente conocida como Ong's Hat, sobre un grupo de científicos que había conseguido viajar entre dimensiones y una posterior persecución y encubrimiento por parte de una oscura conspiración. Desplegado a través de documentos impresos enviados por correo (en el sentido tradicional), BBS (Bulletin Board Systems) y más tarde blogs, videos y radio, el complejo textual Ong's Hat logró crear una comunidad de creyentes que discutieron y ampliaron la narrativa, apropiándose de ella y renegando de sus creadores originales. Este artículo plantea aproximarse a Ong's Hat a través de la semiótica interpretativa de Umberto Eco, particularmente sus ideas sobre cooperación textual entre lector y texto. Partiendo de ahí, se analizan las estrategias textuales mediante las cuales Ong's Hat perfiló a sus Lectores Modelo. Para ello, también se hace uso de conceptos ligados a la transmedialidad y a la metodologia de Margrit Scherier, para evaluar como ciertos textos consiguen confundir a sus lectores sobre su estatus de realidad.

Palabras clave: transmedia, interpretación, cooperación textual, estrategias textuales, Lector Modelo, BBS, ARG

Introduction

In the late 1970's, in a forest in southern New Jersey, a community of theoretical scientists from Princeton, spiritual researchers, and avant-garde artists self-denominated the 'Moorish Science Ashram' – also founders of the ICS (Institute for Chaos Studies) – conducted research on 'cognitive chaos'. By the ending of this decade, this group created a device designated as 'the Egg' which functioned as a heightened sensory deprivation chamber in order to achieve a state in which a person could experience the moment when a particle becomes a wave. During one experiment, the Egg disappeared with a person inside it. Moments afterwards, it appeared again, and the person inside of it told them of his experience: he had travelled to an alternate dimension, another planet, exactly like Earth, but without humans. After this accidental discovery, members of the ICS began traveling to this alternate dimension frequently until eventually many of them moved there, some even having offspring in that dimension. However, knowledge of this alternate dimension and the possibility of gaining access to it was silenced by several conspiracies seeking to deprive humanity of its potential (Matheny 2002).

At this point, most readers might immediately feel suspicious about the veracity of this story, commonly referred to as *Ong's Hat*, after the New Jersey

ghost town where the conspiracy had supposedly taken place. Given how outlandish some of the details seem, one would be hard pressed to believe in it, but believe in it some did. In fact, in the late 90's and early 2000's a large online community formed around the *Ong's Hat* narrative to actively discuss it, speculate about its authenticity, do research and ponder upon its implications if found to be true. When Joseph Matheny, one of the primary responsible figures for the creation and divulgation of the Ong's Hat texts, announced the ending of the experiment, several members of the online community doubted him or plainly discredited him, believing he had either 'sold out' or been co-opted, or, even more interesting, believing that this announcement was another clue, a coded invitation to continue the search for Ong's Hat (Kinsella 2011: 139-142). Even after the same Matheny called attention to the fictitious nature of it all in more recent years (New World Disorder Magazine 2008; Paskin 2018), to this day there are people who still go to the Pine Barrens to look for the interdimensional gate.

A 'rational' reader may wonder: why? And the easiest answer might be that these readers have overinterpreted the *Ong's Hat* text, effectively being unable to distinguish the line between fact and fiction. There is another possible answer: the text itself provoked that confusion. I propose there is a third possible answer: there is a dialectic relationship between the text and the reader which affords the confusion. In other words, the *Ong's Hat* text contained in itself the possibility of being overinterpreted, a possibility that is actualised in the reader.

In his book, *Lector in Fabula* (1994), Umberto Eco proposed that the text envisions and, what is more, constructs its Model Reader. In this paper I will try to argue that the *Ong's Hat* text, through its complex and sophisticated textual strategies involving transmedia storytelling, hypermedia, and the problematization of phenomenal worlds, constructs a Model Reader that is an overinterpreter, a suspicious Model Reader.

1. A brief history of *Ong's Hat*

Ong's Hat, also known as *The Incunabula Papers*, first appeared in the end of the 80's and beginning of the 90's. The phenomenon was spawned by two printed documents: *Ong's Hat: Gateway to the Dimensions! A Full Color Brochure for the Institute of Chaos Studies and the Moorish Science Ashram in Ong's Hat, New Jersey* and *Incunabula: A Catalogue of Rare Books, Manuscripts & Curiosa—Conspiracy Theory, Frontier Science & Alternative Worlds* (Matheny: 2002). *Ong's Hat: Gateway to the Dimensions!* was the first to appear. It was a brochure sent out by post to several addresses, containing the detailed plot of the *Ong's Hat* story summarised above. A crucial aspect to bear in mind is that it is framed as an authentic document, albeit a secret document,

written by anonymous members of the Institute for Chaos Studies (ICS) and "disguised as a sort of New Age vacation brochure" (Matheny 2002: 58, *italics in the original*). Another key aspect of it, is that it is not only a historical account of the development of interdimensional travel in Ong's Hat and what happened afterwards, but it also delves at length into explanations of how interdimensional travel was achieved, referencing complex theoretical physics and mathematics, particularly chaos theory, relativity and quantum mechanics, all combined with a new age mixture of tantric beliefs and psychedelic experimentation. The brochure is open ended, explicitly inviting speculation about whether or not the revelations will continue.

The *Incunabula* catalogue appeared some time later, supposedly published by a man named Emory Cranston and distributed in the same manner as the *Ong's Hat: Gateway to the Dimensions!* brochure. It was – as its title announced – a catalogue of brochures, pamphlets, scientific studies, testimonies, journals, and pulp and science fiction (some of them real and some of them non-existent). Each of these sources appears with a summary and comments which, altogether, read as a narrative expanding the Ong's Hat universe, providing more details about the people involved (the ICS and the Moorish Science Ashram), their ideas, beliefs and motivations, their experiments and more scientific material supporting the possibility of interdimensional travel.

By the end of 1992, a third document appeared. It was published by a man named Joseph Matheny, who was purportedly investigating the authenticity of the two first documents. It was written as a journal entry, dated on October 13, 1992, and most of it is a transcription of an interview with Nick Herbert, a physicist cited in the *Incunabula* catalogue. In the interview, Herbert speaks about quantum tantra and alternate dimensions, both topics that Herbert has written about (in real books that can even be purchased on Amazon). The interview is stopped after Matheny asks Herbert about interdimensional travel and the Egg crafts used for it.

Finally, in 1994, Matheny published another entry in his journal, dated on January 23 that same year. In it, he transcribes a phone interview with Emory Cranston, the supposed editor of the *Incunabula* catalogue. The interview focuses on the catalogue and some of the entries in it, but as it progresses it becomes a very ambiguous testimonial of interdimensional travel. Cranston confesses being part of the interdimensional cult (ICS and Moorish Science Ashram) and having visited Java2, an alternate Earth. This interview, like the one with Herbert, is also stopped abruptly.

But *Ong's Hat: Gateway to the Dimensions!*, the first document, had appeared before it was sent as a brochure. It had appeared in a science fiction 'zine' (a self-published magazine also sent through the mail service) as a short story in 1988. It was written by Peter Lamborn Wilson, (a.k.a Hakim Bay) (Kinsella 2011: 80). Joseph Matheny, an acquaintance of Lamborn Wilson, read this short story and thought he could use it to start an experiment. With the

help of Lamborn Wilson and a visual artist named James Koehnline, Matheny edited *Ong's Hat: Gateway to the Dimensions!* to make it look as a brochure, then sent hundreds of xeroxed copies to a remailing system in Hong Kong, which in turn sent it to hundreds of addresses provided by Matheny in the U.S., addresses of friends, acquaintances and members of the mailing community who were already receiving zines on fringe topics related to conspiracy theories, science fiction, and new age philosophy. The brochure would then arrive as if it had been originally mailed from Hong Kong, with no trace of the original senders. Using the same method, the group distributed their second collaboration, *Incunabula*, written again by Lamborn Wilson and illustrated by Koehnline. This second collaboration marked the end of the group of co-authors. From then on, Matheny continued alone, penning the two aforementioned interviews.

In 1993, being an enthusiast of bulletin board systems (BBS)[1], Matheny saw potential in that medium and decided to post the *Ong's Hat* texts there. When the internet became more widespread, he created incunabula.org, where he transferred the archive from the bulletin boards and started adding articles and chats referencing *Ong's Hat*. Matheny also began creating several websites related to the topic, interconnecting all of them through hyperlinks in texts, images, graphics, etc., so new potential readers would have more than one access way to the *Ong's Hat* universe (Paskin 2018). Once online, the community around the *Ong's Hat* mystery grew and with it, the text itself expanded, forming a continuously growing, self-feeding textual complex. Platforms for discussion independent of Matheny were set up, such as www.interdimension.org and very prominently, DarkPlanetOnline, where members of the community would debate, share thoughts, hypothesis, experiences, and plan trips to *Ong's Hat* (Kinsella 2011: 71).

In spite the expansion of the *Ong's Hat* text now exceeding Matheny's control, he remained the leading figure and content procurer for the community, publishing an interactive ebook (Matheny 2002 [1999]), an interview with people that supposedly lived in the Ashram at Ong's Hat as children (Matheny 2000), and even appearing in the radio show: Coast to Coast (Bell 2000). It is important to remember, however, that for this community, Matheny was not the author of the *Ong's Hat* mystery, but a member of the community, a pioneer with further research conducted than most of them, and, in that sense, an authority, but not an author.

Eventually and predictably, the story acquired a life of its own for the members of the community. Though some of them remained fairly sceptical and participated out of curiosity, for fun, or as an opportunity to bond with other people with similar interests, others were truly enticed by the possibility of the Ong's Hat papers being authentic or at least being based on reality. Between 1999 and 2001 – the peak of interest in *Ong's Hat* – several members built on the original mythos tying it with personal experiences, with other speculative literature, with other conspiracy theories, and, what is more

interesting, some believed they were experiencing supernatural events in the form of "synchronicities" (coincidences), vivid dreams about parallel universes, sights of otherworldly creatures, voices, etc. (see transcriptions of the original testimonies and debates in Kinsella 2011: 85-148). Among these devoted members of the community, however, a rift occurred after Matheny appeared on the radio show *Coast to Coast* in 2000. Some started suspecting everything was a hoax that Matheny created to get media attention and felt betrayed. Others believed in *Ong's Hat* so ardently that they wanted to go further into it and thought Matheny had the key, so some of them tracked him down and started knocking on his door, peeking through his windows, and sleeping in his yard (Paskin 2018).

In the summer of 2001, two seminal alternate reality games (ARG) were launched: *The Majestic* by Electronic Arts and *The Beast* by Microsoft (Szulborski 2005). Members of the community were worried about big companies appropriating the kind of interactive, open-ended story complex *Ong's Hat* had pioneered. This discouraged some of the members of the community, and Joseph Matheny, who was already discouraged by the people who had taken the story too seriously, saw the appearance of those ARG as the final nail on the coffin for *Ong's Hat*[2] and decided to put an end to it. In August 2001, in the main message board, he wrote:

> Ong's Hat Tantric Egg Research Center was a necessary ruse for deflecting attention from our real project – to open up your conduits, brother and sisters, to rip off the confining condom of language and to Fuck Nature Unprotected (qtd in Kinsella 2011: 139).

The response by the community was mixed. Many were disappointed, some were angry, but others among the most committed members disregarded the statement by Matheny and thought the outcome of it would eventually prove positive, since it would eliminate the unconvinced members and leave only the deserving ones. Read, for example, this post by user Harla Quinn:

> Hey, no matter what everyone's interpretation of the "official statement", the themes and science have a helluva lot of validity – I think EVERY ONE here knows that which is why you are HERE and not joining in the chorus line elsewhere – and my efforts toward untangling the quantum entanglement question for me doesn't end with an 'announcement' [...] the "best" we can hope for from the recent exodus is that there won't be anymore disruption underfoot. [...] The Majestic gamers will look for their clues and move on to the next level. The newbies and naysayers will point and laugh and pat themselves on the back that they "got it". (snicker) All that serves to clear the board – which is fine by me. (qtd in Kinsella 2011: 142).

In spite of the statement, the quest to solve the Ong's Hat mystery did not stop immediately, but without Matheny's leadership and production of texts, the community slowly dispersed until it eventually disappeared, and all forums were abandoned and eventually taken offline.

However, the influence of the *Ong' Hat* text did not end with the community nor with the forums. As it was previously mentioned, there are still people who travel to The Pine Barren's forest in New Jersey in search of the interdimensional gate, either with serious curiosity or with an ironic detachment. Moreover, some of the ideas in the *Ong's Hat* story have been absorbed by current conspiracy theories, such as QAnon (Coaston 2018) and The Montauk Project (González 2016).

2. Text interpretation

The *Ong's Hat* phenomenon constitutes a deeply interesting object to be analyzed from a textual interpretation perspective. *Ong's Hat* is a text, or more accurately, a textual complex formed of the thousands of chats, videos, interviews, audio recordings, etc. Even though we should keep in mind that *Ong's Hat* technically has hundreds of authors, we will focus on Matheny as the main author. We know that the whole phenomenon originated with two main texts: first, *Ong's Hat: Gateway to the Dimensions!* and then the *Incunabula* catalogue. Locating us at the metalevel, we know that these two documents have empirical authors: Matheny, Lombard Wilson (the actual writer of the texts), Koehnline and Herbert, with Matheny being the preeminent author of *Ong's Hat* as a project, giving it was his idea to repurpose Lombard Wilson's stories and use different media to get to an audience. It follows that we can trace the origins of the *Ong's Hat* textual complex to Joseph Matheny.

In a recent interview with podcaster Willa Paskin, Matheny expressed that he is not happy with the way some of the members of the *Ong's Hat* community interpreted the text.

> The people that were absolutely positively convinced that we were up to something nefarious, that we were a mind-control government agency [...] those people are not pleasant. They don't make the environment pleasant, they started to make the game unpleasant (Matheny interviewed by Paskin 2018).

He also said that neither he nor the text are responsible for the most outlandish experiences some of the members of the audience had. When asked about the synchronicities, he answered that it was: "Not anything I did, not anything the story did, but what they did" (ibid 2018). Nonetheless, in another moment of the interview, he acknowledges that probably he didn't foresee how the text *could* be read: "I was imagining that there was (sic) enough clues in the text that people would not take it seriously completely. [...] Eventually I came to the conclusion that I was wrong about that" (ibid). And on his official website, as a header for the *Ong's Hat* archive, Matheny has the following disclaimer:

> While I am quite proud of the framework I created to deliver the OH story / *can no longer endorse some of the ideas used in the actual story content* (co-created) or some views held by some of the people behind those ideas. (Matheny 2018, italics added by me – J.F.).

In this post we can see how Matheny accepts some responsibility by acknowledging there are 'ideas in the actual story content' that he cannot endorse anymore.

Ong's Hat was a fictional story, the *Incunabula* catalogue a fake catalogue. Despite this, several of the readers of these texts ended up not only believing them, but actually having supernatural experiences. Wouldn't it be reasonable to say these people overinterpreted the original texts? That they found much more than what was actually there. That certainly seems to be Matheny's opinion and he is the main author. We should keep in mind, though, that the empirical author's intended message is not equivalent with the text's potential message.

Umberto Eco is possibly the semiotician who has concerned himself the most with the formulation of an exhaustive theory of the mechanisms of text interpretation. In *The Open Work* (1962), he started developing his reception theory. In it, he focuses on the interpretation of open works, texts that encourage interpretative freedom (Eco 1962: 4). Eco's formulation of the problem seems to describe *Ong's Hat*:

> The work remains inexhaustible insofar as it is "open," because in it an ordered world based on universally acknowledged laws is being replaced by a world based on ambiguity, both in the negative sense that directional centers are missing and in a positive sense, because values and dogma are constantly being placed in question (ibid, 9).

Furthermore, Eco distinguishes a subcategory of open work which he terms "work in movement". Works in movement: "characteristically consist of unplanned or physically incomplete structural units" (ibid, 12). *Ong's Hat* certainly fits into this category of open work, given that it hints at its incomplete nature, both explicitly and structurally. For example, *Ong's Hat*: *Gateway to the Dimensions!* says this at the end: "We haven't spoken yet of our enemies. Indeed, there remains much we have not said" (Matheny 2002: 58). The text is indicating that there is information left out that in fact belongs to the text, but furthermore the adverb "yet" indicates that the authors have the intention of speaking of those enemies at some point, but not now, and the use of the present perfect tense in a negation: "we have not said" speaks of the probability of "saying" later on, as opposed to a simple past construction such as "did not say", which closes the door on the subject.

The *Incunabula* catalogue increases the incompleteness of the *Ong's Hat* text as a whole, portraying itself not as a primary source, but merely a compendium of primary sources on the matter, merely a metatext. The documents invite the reader, both directly and indirectly, to join the quest for truth. As Eco states, with works in movement: "the author offers the interpreter, the performer, the addressee a work to be completed" (Eco 1962: 19). When

Matheny added the two interviews, he portrayed himself as the first reader who had taken up the challenge posed by these mysterious texts, effectively setting the works in movement.

Works in movement complicate the task of distinguishing 'correct' interpretations from 'incorrect' ones even more than regular open works, since they open the "possibility of numerous different personal interventions", even interventions that the author "could not have foreseen" (Eco 1962: 19).

Nonetheless Eco is clear about something: the work's interpretation has to remain honest to his/her author's intention:

> [The open work] is not an amorphous invitation to indiscriminate participation. The invitation offers the performer the opportunity for an oriented insertion into something which always remains the world intended by the author [...] The author is the one who proposed a number of possibilities which had already been rationally organized, oriented, and endowed with specifications for proper development (ibid, 19).

But how can it be, then, that the interpretation task could, at the same time be bound by the author's textual design, and out of his/her predictions? For this we need to turn to later Eco. At the Tanner Conferences in 1990, Eco distinguished between the author as the empirical subject of enunciation, and the author as a Model Author "present only as a textual strategy" and for Eco this distinction renders: "the notion of an empirical author's intention radically useless" (1992b: 66).

The key to assert which is a "correct" interpretation and which one's not, then is to discover the intentions of the Model Author. And in order to do that, a Model Reader is required. Eco further clarifies in *Lector in Fabula* (1994):

> On the one hand, as we have said up till now, the empirical author, as the subject of the textual enunciation, formulates a hypothesis of a Model Reader and, when translating it into the language of its own strategy, it characterizes himself as subject of the enunciation, with an equally 'strategic' language, as a mode of textual operation. However, on the other hand, the empirical reader, as the concrete subject of the cooperation act, also has to fabricate a hypothesis about the Author, deducing it precisely from the data available in the textual strategy (Eco 1994: 89, translated by me – J.F.).

In short, both the Model Author and the Model Reader are deduced from the text itself, i.e., the intention of the text is what has to be taken into account: "Above all, for textual cooperation it shouldn't be understood as the actualization of the empirical subject of the enunciation's intentions, but rather of the intentions virtually contained in the statement itself" (ibid, 90, Translated by me).

Our task then, if we are to evaluate the interpretations of the *Ong's Hat* textual complex is to focus on the textual complex itself.

3. Textual Strategies

Eco posits the following maxim about the textual mechanism: "*a text is a product whose interpretative fate must be a part of its own generative mechanism*: to generate a text is to apply a strategy which includes predictions about the movements of the other" (1994: 79, Translated by me, italics in the original). Eco compares this generative process with warfare or a game, in which one must try to predict the movements of the adversary, and in order to do that, one must envision a model of that adversary. This prediction is not a passive process: "to predict a Model Reader does not mean simply 'expecting' it to exist, but rather mobilizing the text to construct it" (ibid, 81, Translated by me).

What are the strategies in the Ong's Hat textual complex? How does it construct its Model Reader?

3.1. Intermedia storytelling and convergence culture

To discover *Ong's Hat*'s textual strategies, we should first direct our attention to the media it employs. *Ong's Hat*'s use of different media is a crucial part of its textual strategy. We could say it belongs to the printed medium, since it was, in its origins, a brochure and a catalogue, but we should not forget that, in its distribution, *Ong's Hat* employed the post as its medium for delivery, and the use of that medium was integral to the text itself since it inscribed it in the mail art movement. Mail art was a countercultural movement starting in the 1950's in the U.S, defined as: "the cooperative appropriation, alteration, distribution, and remediation of various mailed memorabilia" (Kinsella 2011: 63), and a very important part of that memorabilia were science fiction and conspiracy theories zines (Merrick 2004). Eco argues that one of the simplest strategies in which a text can construct its Model Reader, is by literally aiming at it, through the selection of medium, language, references, etc. (1994: 80,82). By including itself in the mail art movement, which was already closely tied to counterculture and prone to embrace nonmainstream narratives with a taste for the speculative, *Ong's Hat* reached its target audience. Furthermore, we should remember it was sent through a remailing system thanks to which the sender's address appeared to be in Hong Kong.

Secondly, both *Ong's Hat: Gateway to de Dimensions!* and *Incunabula* were both illustrated by James Koehnline, which means they were at once written and visual media. When Matheny uploaded the documents on BBS, a new medium was employed, and with its final migration to the internet, the multimedia character of the textual complex increased. Matheny added the audio recording of the interview with people who had allegedly lived in Ong's

Hat ashram when children, and the websites he created were filled with imagery, either appropriated by him or authored by Koehnline.

Nevertheless, *Ong's Hat* was not merely a multimedia story, it was a transmedia story: "A transmedia story unfolds across multiple media platforms, with each new text making a distinctive and valuable contribution to the whole. In the ideal form of transmedia storytelling, each medium does what it does best" (Jenkins 2006: 95). *Ong's Hat* fits perfectly into this description. Not only was the story present in different media, but it continued unfolding across different media (e.g., in the recorded interviews, the websites and discussion forums, the Coast to Coast interview with Matheny) and using each medium with a purpose.

For example, Matheny used the internet to *Ong's Hat* advantage by filling his posts and the interactive e-book with links redirecting readers to other websites with more information, some of those websites being authentic, others being hoaxes (Benjamin Frisch's testimony in Paskin:2018). Also, just as Matheny had used mail before to target an audience, he seeded links to *Ong's Hat* related websites in sites dealing with topics ranging from videogames to conspiracy theories (Kinsella 2011: 68).

This moving work created by Matheny and company became moving in a very real sense through transmedia storytelling, since committed members of the audience had to literally move through the internet, jump from one website to another, try to find the books compiled in the *Incunabula* catalogue either printed or in digital form, listen to a recorded interview, and with some even going to The Pine Barren's forest. Jenkins speaks of certain kinds of transmedia story worlds that "introduce new aspects of the world with each new instalment, so that more energy gets put into mapping the world than inhabiting it" (Jenkins 2006: 114). Reading becomes discovering, and in a way, co-creating.

That is why Jenkins characterises transmedia storytelling as storytelling for the age of convergence culture, an age he identifies with the formation of knowledge communities and collective intelligence, since some transmedia narrative universes are so expansive (*Star Wars*, *Harry Potter*, *Marvel*) that they make it impossible for one single reader to 'get it', promoting the formation of fan communities able to pool their knowledge and build a collective concordance online (ibid, 127).

3.2. This is not a game

The use of transmedia is just part of the strategy, both targeting a specific audience, providing multiple entrances to the story universe, and what is more important, inciting active participation. Another part of the strategy is related with how the texts challenge the reader.

Ong's Hat: Gateway to the Dimensions! starts with the following statement:

> You would not be reading this brochure if you had not already penetrated half-way to the ICS. You have been searching for us without knowing it, following oblique references in crudely Xeroxed marginal "samisdat" publications, crackpot mystical pamphlets [...] or perhaps through various obscure mimeographed technical papers on the edges of "chaos science" — through pirate computer networks — or even through pure synchronicity and the pursuit of dreams.
> In any case we know something about you, your interests, deeds and desires, works and days — and we know your address.
> *Otherwise... you would not be reading this brochure* (Matheny 2002: 46, italics in the original).

In this excerpt, the text directly addresses the reader, and by adding references that the reader is almost sure to know (given that the publications mentioned were common among the mail art community and the BBS users), and the mentioning of the senders having their address (which is obvious given it arrived to the first readers mailbox) the addressing is strengthened, making it seem personal, as if it was really addressed to that person and not just a rhetorical device.

The brochure closes with:

> This text, disguised as a sort of New Age vacation brochure, must fall silent at this point, satisfied that it has embedded within itself enough clues for its intended readers (who are already halfway to Ong's hat in any case) but not enough for those with little faith to follow (ibid, 58).

In these last lines, the brochure poses a challenge for the reader. First of all, a decoding challenge. An indefinite number of clues are awaiting within the text to be discovered and followed. More importantly though, in the context of the story related in the brochure, this statement hints that the importance of this clues is larger than the text itself: following them can reveal the mystery of Ong's Hat and interdimensional travel, as well as the conspiracy around it. Finally, a further filter for a Model Reader is set when it references 'its intended readers' who must have faith.

The *Incunabula* catalogue continues with this strategy: "This catalogue has been put together with a purpose: to alert YOU to a vast cover up" (Matheny 2002: 18). It mentions the perils involved in pursuing research "we know of *at least two murders* so far in connection with this material" (ibid, 18, italics in the original) and separates itself from conspiracy theories by saying it is supported by real science, again filtering readership: "This will become clear to anyone who takes the trouble to read the background material we recommend and offer for sale" (ibid, 18), finally closing the catalogue with: "Remember: parallel worlds exist. They *have already been reached*. A vast cover-up denies YOU all knowledge. Only INCUNABULA can enlighten you, because only INCUNABULA dares" (ibid, 45, italics in the original).

The challenges to follow the threads and solve the mystery are akin to the ethos of a game. Indeed, Matheny has characterised *Ong's Hat* as a game in retrospect (in Paskin 2018, as well as in an essay in Szulborski: 2005). This and the transmedia nature of *Ong's Hat* link it with alternate reality games

(ARGs), transmedia game narratives that require following traces through the several media that comprise the game and in some cases also requiring activities in the real world. However, this categorisation entails a problem. Games are characterised by the knowledge of participating in a game. Players of *Clue* know that they are not in fact solving a real murder. The *Ong's Hat* readers who followed 'the instructions' and delved deeper into the mystery did not know – or at least were not told at any point – they were playing a game.

Jane McGonigal terms ARG's 'pervasive games' and defines them as "'mixed reality' games that use mobile, ubiquitous and embedded digital technologies to create virtual playing fields in everyday spaces" (2003: 1), and among these she distinguishes a subcategory: 'immersive games': "a form of pervasive play distinguished by the added element of their (somewhat infamous) "This is not a game" rhetoric. They do everything in their power to erase game boundaries – physical, temporal and social — and to obscure the metacommunications that might otherwise announce, "This is play."" (McGonigal 2003: 2).

Ong's Hat does fit that description and the strategic choice of not telling its reader that it is a game is fundamental. As Juri Lotman explains:

> Play is the simultaneous realization (not their alternation in time!) of practical and conventional behaviour. The player must simultaneously remember that he is participating in a conventional (not real) situation (a child knows that the tiger in front of him is a toy and is not afraid of it), and not remember it (when playing, the child considers the toy tiger to be a real one) (Lotman 2011: 254).

By not revealing its nature as a game, immersive games 'hack' the logic of play and problematise the boundaries between game and reality.

3.3. The Mechanism of Deceit

Finally, we must deal with the most obvious strategy of the *Ong's Hat* textual complex, already touched upon in the previous subsection: lying about its authenticity.

Margrit Schreier (2004) has analysed a similar phenomenon where part of an audience was unable to evaluate the reality status of a text: *The Blair Witch Project*. She proposes a methodological framework to analyse the textual mechanisms that afford such a confusion. In the following paragraphs I will offer a brief outline of Schreier's framework.

She starts by affirming that: "'Evaluating a product's reality status' thus encompasses evaluations of product type, content, and mode" (Schreier 2004: 313), therefore she proposes three perspectives for evaluation:

- **Pragmatic perspective** – Product type: related with the status of the text. Schreier follows the distinction commonly made by literary theory: fiction/non-fiction, adding a middle category of hybrid genres.

- **Semantic perspective** – Concerns the degree of plausibility of the content.
- **Mode** – Formal characteristics of the text: style, structure, intensity, and several more specific formal characteristics depending on the medium/media used.

Schreier identifies then three phenomenal worlds differentiating the types of signal and criteria to assess the reality status of a text:

- **Material world** – The physical features of the text.
- **Experiential world** – How the text is capable of connecting, recreating or inducing experiences and emotions.
- **Cognitive world** – How the product is built, structured or organised to be understood.

These phenomenal worlds are applied to the semantic perspective and the perspective of mode, and though both levels interrelate, they can function somewhat independently during the reception process. Schreier gives some examples. *Oliver Twist*, by Charles Dickens, regarding the semantic perspective, exhibits great plausibility in all three phenomenal worlds: faithful and detailed description of London, of costumes, of physical characteristics of people (material); an equally detailed portrayal of the emotional inner lives and relationships between characters (experiential); and credible narrative structure and descriptions (cognitive). With regards to mode, the novel would score low in the material world, since it does not provide any stimulation of the senses, i.e., being a written work, everything has to be imagined. Nonetheless, since the categories interrelate, a low score in one perspective can be compensated with a high score in another one, e.g.: the plot structure in *Oliver Twist* (cognitive) succeeds at providing an engrossing experience, and one cares about Oliver and his friends and foes which renders everything an immersive experience (experiential).

Finally, Schreier proposes the concept of 'genre schemata', a set of expectations related to the previous textual experience of the reader which have an influence on the aforementioned categories. If, for instance, one has experience reading fantasy novels, one will expect low plausibility in the material world in relation to the semantic perspective (since one expects unicorns, dragons, elves, etc.), but high marks with regards to experiential and cognitive worlds. Schreier's 'genre schemata' is very similar to the concept of 'intertextual frame' proposed by Eco (1994: 116-120). For Eco, in order to interpret every situation – not exclusively textual situations – we recur to interpretative frames. For example, when being in a party, our interpretative frame will be 'party' and we will expect and judge events according to that frame unless something changes it (ibid, 114-115). An intertextual frame is a subcategory of frame dependent on the reader's intertextual competence.

Both Eco and Schreier stress the importance of the textual characteristics which 'let the reader know' which product type he/she is dealing with, and thus which genre schemata or intertextual frame is pertinent.

Schreier points to the 'paramount importance' of paratexts (titles, epigraphs, disclaimers, back cover synthesis, notes about the genre, publishing information).

> This raises the question of what happens in media reception when variations of genre schemata cross the line between the two product types, that is, when the paratextual signals themselves lose their unambiguous status and no longer serve to classify a particular media product as either fact or fiction. (Schreier 2004: 319).

Neither *Ong's Hat: Gateway to the Dimensions!*, nor the *Incunabula* catalogue, nor Matheny's journal entries, nor the interview with the alleged Ashram survivors, nor the hundreds of posts by Matheny were accompanied by any sort of paratext pointing to its fiction status. On the contrary, the available paratext claimed to be authentic documents about events in the real world (and alternate real worlds). Readers who arrived to the Ong's Hat textual complex had no indications that they should interpret the texts with a science fiction genre schemata or intertextual frame. Rather, the content pointed them in the direction of a speculative science and new age philosophy frames. If a reader wanted to conduct research on the sources listed in the catalogue, he/she would find several real books. The one's that were not found were already labelled as extremely rare or untraceable in the catalogue. Furthermore, we should remember that Matheny targeted audiences already interested in conspiracy theories.

One could aver, of course, that the strangeness of the content (semantic perspective in Schreier) should be enough to alert readers of the fiction status of the *Ong's Hat* texts. After all, it would score very low on an evaluation of its material world. But let's not forget this was happening at the very same time the internet was becoming a mainstream medium. Michael Kinsella says that legends tend to thrive in online environments "precisely because we live in an age full of technological wonder" (2011: 47). In other words, if suddenly connecting with people from the other side of the globe in real time was possible thanks to science, who was to say interdimensional travel is totally implausible? The use of theoretical physics to explain the possibility of such travel and the referencing of real physicists also contributed to give a higher score in the cognitive world of the semantic perspective.

However, it is in the perspective of mode where the textual strategies to "fool" the reader are the most sophisticated and effective. Though *Ong's Hat* would have a very low score regarding the material world in the perspective of mode (because it's very far away from recreating the sensorial experiences one would hypothetically feel when traveling to parallel dimensions), it compensates with very high marks in the experiential and cognitive worlds through the use of a variety of media. Bolter and Grusin have commented extensively on how the multiplication of media provides experiences: "digital hypermedia seek the real by multiplying mediation so as to create a feeling of fullness, a satiety of experience, which can be taken as reality" (2000: 53); "The

excess of media becomes an authentic experience, not in the sense that it corresponds to an external reality, but rather precisely because it is does not feel compelled to refer to anything beyond itself" (ibid, 54); "The psychological sense hypermediacy is the experience that she has in and of the presence of media; it is the insistence that the experience of the medium is itself an experience of the real" (ibid, 70). By utilising several media, the post, BBS, radio and the internet as media for distribution, and text, visuals, and audio as supports, *Ong's Hat* provided an intense experience, one that, for some members of the community was so intense that it became their real life

4. The Suspicious Model Reader

It might seem counterintuitive to refer to a 'suspicious Model Reader' in the context of this paper, since a suspicious reader would likely doubt or outright reject the text, specially such a secretive, purposefully obscure and eccentric text as *Ong's Hat*. But the suspicion meant here is more complex.

There are texts that by claiming to hold secrets about the true nature of the real world, invite an interpretation of the world itself as part of the text. This was the case with medieval scholastics, who read elements and events of the world as signs in accordance with the Bible and this is the case today with adherents to the QAnon conspiracy theory. This is the type of reading Umberto Eco refers to when he writes about 'suspicious interpretation'.

One of the keys to understanding the *Ong's Hat* phenomenon lies in how it invited to read the world in search of signs, clues, and hints that either offered proof of the purported conspiracy or invited further research. Its transmedia nature, together with its misleading paratexts, content and intertextual references, problematised not only the reality status of the text, but the very boundaries of the text which enabled it to expand and appropriate texts which were in fact foreign to the textual complex, e.g., Matheny would write in the discussion forums claiming that coded messages and clues would appear in popular media (such as songs and TV shows) (Paskin 2018). For those who believed in it, the world became suspect, disparate occurrences became charged with meaning, hence the synchronicities experienced by some members of the community, and hence the trips to the Pine Barrens looking for indexes pointing to either the ashram or the coverup.

Eco writes: "The signature network allows for an infinite interpretation of the world. But to trigger the impulse to find the signatures, a suspicious reading of the world is required" (1992a: 99, Translation by me). In other words, a text might encourage a hermeneutic drift, but in order to be effective it still needs the cooperation of a reader prone to that mode of interpretation. Through the highly complex and sophisticated set of textual strategies analysed here, *Ong's Hat* constructed its own suspicious Model Reader[3].

Final comments

In this paper, I have brought together concepts from media studies and semiotics of interpretation in an attempt to analyse a complex media phenomenon and its unforeseen persuasive power. This analysis could be built upon to analyse similar phenomena such as conspiracy theories and fake news.

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Notes

1 A form of electronic message board made possible by a networking of computers through a phone line, a precursor of the internet that was used during the 80's and 90's.

2 To understand why the appearance of those ARG was so disappointing to Matheny, one should understand his purpose in starting the Ong's Hat experiment. "Talking to each other and telling stories is something that we've always done, and it's something we've kind of turned over to merchants in a lot of ways so I try to find subversive ways to bring people back around and let them know they're the storytellers" (interviewed by Paskin 2018). Even more telling is a quote by Dostoevsky posted in his official website: "You cannot imagine what wrath and sadness overcome your whole soul when a great idea, which you have long cherished as holy, is caught up by the ignorant and dragged forth before fools like themselves into the street, and you suddenly meet it in the market unrecognizable, in the mud, absurdly set up, without proportion, without harmony, the plaything of foolish louts!" (see https://josephmatheny.com/).

3 Interestingly enough, among the many winks in *Ong's Hat: Gateway to the Dimensions!*, we can find a secret group named "Garden of forking paths". The allusion to the short story by Jorge Luis Borges is clear. Also in that text there is a machine called 'Metaphase typewriter' which is sort of a random text generator that seems to be the realization of a device discussed in Umberto Eco's *Foucault's Pendulum,* a novel dealing with overinterpretation.

AN INTERVIEW WITH RHEA COLASO on semiotics and marketing

Interviewed by

Eleni Alexandri

Introduction

In light of the special issue's themes, pop culture, media, and transmediality, I chose to interview Rhea Colaso, an MA graduate of Tartu University's semiotics department. Rhea has lived in several places, including India, Kenya, the United States, and now Estonia, consequently being exposed to numerous cultural environments. This drove her desire to observe and attempt to better understand how individuals throughout the globe make sense of themselves and communicate their thoughts and emotions. She began her first internships in brand strategy in the eleventh grade, and soon made her way into advertising, marketing, and numerous branding agencies.

During her bachelor's degree at Boston University, she studied economics, biology, and communication concurrently in an effort to broaden her horizons and get a more holistic knowledge of people and their motivations. After receiving her degree, she returned to India, where she achieved one of her biggest accomplishments to date: via her work at Please See, she contributed in changing Indian customers' perceptions about Indian food and their buying habits. However, the search for patterns in human behaviour and the need for a deeper comprehension of meaning brought her to semiotics and Tartu University. Today, Rhea works for Bedford Row Capital, a debt structuring company that helps small and medium-sized businesses raise capital for their businesses or projects. The knowledge she gained in semiotics has made her more effective in the world of marketing and enhanced her existing abilities. In this interview, Rhea Colaso talks about her take on pop culture and modern media, semiotics, and shares her experiences in the field of marketing and advertising!

Interview

EA: *Let us begin with one of the main themes of our special issue. How would you define pop culture?*

RC: I would have to go with Gottdiener's approach of pop culture as a three way relationship among: (1) cultural objects that are produced by an industrial process, (2) a set of institutions that produce and distribute such objects on a relatively huge scale, and (3) a collective or social group/mass audience who use such objects within a setting*. Perhaps it is my love for sociosemiotics which is why this definition sticks most in my mind. Yes, we can go with Disney movies or even Disney Land itself as the prime example; however, for me and through my work in understanding the financial markets I prefer to take it in that setting.

On that note, and in the setting of today's financial markets, we tend to distill financial behaviour as a pure economic one, based on 'profit', or 'selfish interests'; however, I would beg to differ. Financial events do not make sense by themselves, but they need to be interpreted in the light of a specific point of view, and become linked to the surrounding world. We have to recall the essential role of human interaction within financial reality in order to consider each market as a particular language, and the interaction as the sign of social inter-subjectivity. Investors are also shaped by the socio-cultural background they live in.

To bring an example from my work, and simultaneously a very contemporary case, I was able to demonstrate the influence of pop culture and media coverage of the Russian-Ukrainian war on the increasing growth of the green bonds market and the urgent demand for 'energy freedom'. Global warming and environmental pollution have been big issues for many years now, but it is only with the recent war and the present media image of Russia that people are beginning to seek alternate energy sources. However, a long-cultivated link between Russia and communism, spread through pop culture, also contributes to the public's opinion of Russia**. Have you ever thought why the intense search for alternative sources was not initiated after the occurrences in Libya, Iraq, Venezuela, or Iran?

* Gottdiener, Mark 1985. Hegemony and mass culture: A semiotic approach. *American Journal of Sociology* 90(5): 979-1001. Available at: https://www.jstor.org/stable/2780086

** Pop culture and the portrayal of commies: https://coldwar.unc.edu/film/

EA: *How about a specific incident in pop culture history? What is an iconic moment that you can think of at the top of your head?*

RC: When the NFT Bored Ape Yacht Club was priced for around 2.9 or 3 Million Dollars***. There is no purpose to this value other than pop culture. Its

importance comes from its celebrity backing (Eminem, Justin Beiber etc.) scarcity, hype, exclusive content etc. I remember looking at it when it was 190$ thinking why would anyone buy this? Few months later, I realised I could have been a millionaire but missed the chance because I didn't understand the 'culture'. It happens.

*** NFT'S Street 2021. The 10 most expensive bored ape yacht club NFT's ever sold. *NFT'S STREET.* Available at: https://www.nftsstreet.com/top-10-most-expensive-bored-ape-yacht-club-nfts/

EA: *Would you say that marketing and advertising are an important part of pop culture?*

RC: Yes, of course! If we look at the definition, other than films, advertising is a powerhouse of cultural object creation at an industrial scale. And now, with user generated content being so popular, but also with the desire to create online communities where people discuss these cultural objects, how could it not be?

In my opinion, if something has not been advertised in some shape or form, it cannot be truly part of pop culture. Most advertisements are based on the underlying consumer trends and how industries are catering to them. So, advertising in some way is a summary of it all presented to semioticians on a silver platter!

EA: *Speaking of semiotics, how did you find out about this field, and what motivated you to enroll in the master's programme of Tartu University?*

RC: It was a mixture of finishing a massive project at my previous company and looking for something new, alongside me being sent to the Semiofest conference held in Mumbai that sparked my interest and shaped the direction of my new adventure to Tartu! Initially, I thought semiotics had something to do with marketing or cultural studies before I joined the program.
Honestly, I had no clue about what semiotics was, until Kalevi Kull's class. I remember everyone speaking about Juri Lotman, and Michael Foucault during orientation and me being like "who are these people? Am I that illiterate?" *laughs*
However, even though I did not know much about semiotics in depth, I was really keen on learning it, as it focuses on how people operate and think.

EA: *You have more than five years of experience in marketing, and you have been working in this field prior and after your graduation from the MA programme of semiotics; what would you say are the unique aspects or tools that semiotics offer in your industry?*

RC: When you create an experience for the consumer or try to study the motivations of an investor, you need semiotics to break down and then create a lifeworld, like the Habermasian concept. The lifeworld represents the cultural background of the social reality in which the interaction is possible. To recreate that interaction, or induce a particular one, you need to really understand where it all comes from and how to activate that.

EA: *Sadly, semiotics is not popular outside academia; how do you explain the role and significance of semiotics to your work environment, and how feasible is it for a semiotician to flourish in marketing and advertising?*

RC: This is definitely up to the student and their interests and their ability to use semiotics in an everyday setting. Being a semiotician makes you creative in finding solutions, however in marketing you will not find the time to do an entire research paper on a topic. Instead, you need to either implement it in your marketing plan, or do a survey of the landscape and the consumer you are marketing to understand their lifeworld. Accordingly, you change the way you design or speak. Obviously the applications aren't limited to just these two. I am currently looking for project-based interns who can use semiotics to:

- Research the keywords and motivations of today's professional investors
- Conduct keyword research on how Google ranks our regulatory announcements

If this sounds interesting or you would like to know more about using semiotics in finance or financial marketing, please write to me at rhea@bedfordrowcapital.com

EA: *What is your semiotic and generally professional opinion on our modern media culture? How it functions and impacts the market, and how the market makes use of it?*

RC: Modern media culture is far too broad to cover in one answer, so I will focus on one topic: crypto-currency. Crypto is the modern media culture in my opinion; a combination of technology, social media, celebrities, influencers, big money investors, films, etc. It has made the financial market a more public place in comparison to the opacity of stock exchanges, venture capital, hedge funds or mutual funds. Now non-professional actors, so everyday people like you and me can become integrated into the 'social world' of the professional actors. Now we know trading lingo, and we're able sell from our phones. It is also a way for us to participate in the activities of pop culture.

As a result, we are able to examine solely economic reasons of non-professional investors, which are a direct result of the glamorisation of the

financial markets in popular culture. The films *Wolf of Wall Street*, *The Big Short*, and *Bad Money*, amongst others, are all great examples of this. It is easy to see that greed is the driving force behind these occurrences. Therefore, when it comes to the popularity of crypto-currencies and NFTs, everyone engaged hopes to reach with minimal to no effort the life of sex, money, power, and glory that is depicted, promoted, and idealised. Many people all around the world were driven by greed to invest all of their life savings in crypto-currencies like LUNA/TERRA, which had a very quick and abrupt decrease, resulting in many losing everything in a split second. The power of financial culture, which is being fostered and pushed through pop culture makes bank deposits, which are safe but offer low interest rates, a paltry choice that is rejected by our modern society.

EA: *Based on your professional experience and general observations, what are some specific strategies that are being implemented in this era of globalisation that effectively target a broad international audience?*

RC: Social media! It is what makes a brand or a person, and also what can end them in matter of seconds, or in the frame of a few characters. The fact that you can create a post on Instagram, and target it for 30€ to an audience who you are trying to market to, is simply revolutionary. Why waste millions on a television advertisement or newspaper when you can find your exact customer at a click of a button?

Furthermore, social media is allowing the creation of trillions of virtual communities based on a shared interest. Just look at Discord; there are jobs for community managers who just need to talk in a group, and keep the activity levels high. The other day I saw 7,000 people watching a movie together that they voted to watch earlier, via their mobile phones. It might make no sense, but it created a sense of being united.

EA: *Can you try to imagine the future of the media landscape? How do you think it will be 10 years from now? What about pop culture?*

RC: That is a great question, but frankly I have no answer. Pop culture only makes sense in a context, and it is continuously being changed through innovations, geopolitical turmoil, energy prices skyrocketing, etc. Due to the coronavirus we have moved online, and the culture became 'work-from-home', which completely changed the entirety of our habits. Sweatpants with a suit on top became part of pop culture. Who would have predicted Corona? Much less the Zoom culture that followed!

EA: *What do you think is going to be the future of semiotics, and especially applied semiotics? If you cannot foresee any great differences or more recognition for our field, what do you think should happen in order to change that fate?*

RC: To begin with, I must mention the sad reality. Nobody knows what semiotics is, except maybe 103 people on this planet. The future of semiotics depends on how we explain to other people what we do and how we can apply its frameworks and theories, without losing their attention in the first few seconds. To make these changes, we need to be much more present in social media, and do a lot more marketing for semiotics as a subject and probable profession. Only then can it survive and thrive as a field; otherwise, it will be a subject studied alongside communication, literature, or marketing.

EA: *Rhea, thank you so much for your time and all your interesting answers! Is there anything else that you would like to share with our readers?*

RC: Finding a job where you do semiotics 24x7 is difficult as most people have no idea what it is. Maybe finding a way to use semiotics in another field such as marketing, law, economics, animal conservation etc., can be a different route to be in the field we all love.

AN INTERVIEW WITH MOHAR KALRA on semiotics and his artistic process

Interviewed by

Daniel Viveros Santillana

Introduction

Driven by the main themes of this special issue, on pop culture, media, and transmediality, the editorial team decided to conduct an interview with Mohar Kalra, a visiting researcher and artist at Tartu University. With a background in engineering and a strong passion for art, Mohar made the decision to broaden his horizons by gaining a deeper understanding of the field of semiotics. The American artist has a deep understanding and respect for a wide variety of artistic mediums and interfaces, and he employs them to provide his audience with engaging interactive experiences. His creations have a number of tiers and levels, and the only thing that's needed to unearth their hidden meanings is audience participation. Mohar explains how his engineering experiences have always guided him towards building new systems of meaning, governed by obvious but also hidden rules; in a way, he had been always using semiotics, but he was not aware of it. Throughout this conversation, he discusses his artwork, the people and ideas that have inspired and influenced him, as well as semiotics.

Interview

DS: *So to begin with, what led you to Tartu?*

MK: So I am from the States, I got my degree in electrical engineering, and I was hoping to build up a practice in media art somewhere abroad after graduation. I was wondering how I could use technology to change the way we perceive systems around us in our everyday lives. Like, how do we introduce

new feelings and new sorts of stimuli into the mundane? In my mind, this is very compatible with semiotics' approach to perception. Because I have a background in engineering, I felt that I understood fairly well the technological systems around us and the meanings that can be projected onto them. However, especially after COVID and the various recent catastrophic climate crises, I wanted to find a way of reconnecting to nature through technology in my artwork, but I knew very little about things outside the world of tech. I had heard a little bit about Estonia's experimentation with technology. A lot of what I had heard came from some propaganda you know — by the government, but still Estonia offers a different paradigm for relating to technology than what we have in the USA. There is experimentation happening here in civic technology administered by the government that could never exist outside of the profit-driven tech model in the US. As I did more digging, I learned that Estonia's environmental culture encompasses environmental folklore, which is a very important part of Estonian identity. Furthermore, the department of semiotics shows particular interest in ecosemiotics and biosemiotics, unpacking biological systems, ecological systems, and understanding how they are linked with each other. It is a great contribution on how we perceive and relate to ecology as a culture, or as different cultures, and also how other non-human organisms do the same. I felt that this was very important and interesting for my work, because it would allow me to fill in the knowledge gap I had regarding how we relate to ecology and systems outside of purely technological ones. And so, all of those factors contributed to my realisation that: "Tartu would be a really great place to land".

DS: *That is pretty interesting, and before coming here did you have any previous experience with semiotics? Perhaps even something about the Tartu-Moscow school?*

MK: I actually had not, but I had experience in fields that now I am learning have been historically very closely tied to semiotics. I had taken classes where we talked about cybernetics, and as I read a lot of interaction design texts now, there are a lot of references, implicit references, to Peirce and Uexküll. And so, coming here made me realise how semiotics is the foundation of the more technologically specific education that I had during my undergrad.

DS: *What about now, are you considering applying your semiotic knowledge in your artistic process?*

MK: Yeah, a lot of my work, until now, has been very much unknowingly influenced by a sort of semiotic approach to my own personal experience. For instance, regarding questions like: "I am feeling this when this happens, what

does that mean to me? What are the perceptual processes going on here? What are the meaning-making processes happening under the surface in my head? And can I bring those out and present them to other people?" So, trying to discover a sort of meaning-making process that leads the audience to different meanings beyond what they ordinarily would have. Now, I think what has been really useful, especially here in Tartu, is understanding formal methodologies of breaking down ways of dissecting that sort of meaning-making and then applying it to specific contexts. So, I can draw from texts about, for instance, indigenous languages in the Amazon or other systems that differently structure ways of relating to nature, and then ask myself "okay, this is how the meaning-making process is working for this community, can I pull something from that?"

DS: *What would you say is the relationship between semiotics and art in your experience? From your website, it is clear that you have a specific background and a very unique artistic style.*

MK: That is true, but I mean at the same time the engineering and the art are really not at odds in the way they might seem. I think at the end of the day, and it is not true for all artists, but for me art is a process of fabricating feeling and meaning. So, it is a process of design and engineering almost; scaffolding an experience. It is a very semiotic related process, because it all comes down to how the viewer will hopefully find some meaning in what you are presenting.

DS: *Speaking about your website, I went through your projects. One of them that caught my attention was* Close Up *(https://mkalra.me/Closeup.html), the interactive comic book. I found it brilliant how the mechanics do not let you close the book, once it is open, unless you go through all the pages, one by one*.

MK: Yeah, and I think this is probably one aspect unique to my process. I try to build a system; a system with specific rules if you will. The rules in this specific case - making you read every page in order to close the book - contribute to the meaning of the work. But, the rules, as part of a system presented to you, invite you to explore as a viewer, and decipher how the system functions. I would say that it is a process that relies heavily on active meaning-making processes on the viewers' part. Through the interaction the system reveals itself, and the viewer figures out what the rules are exactly. Even though the system does not necessarily operate in the same way as systems in the real world, there is definitely need for an internal conversation on the viewer's part, and a recollection of a kind of logic built and used in the real world.

DS: *However, we can see that your projects are quite different with each other, from comic stripes to a collection of different machines. Where do you draw inspiration from?*

MK: Usually it starts with a feeling. When I experience something and I think to myself "oh! That was weird. I did not really expect that" it makes my mind wander. Like once I was in a forest hiking and I noticed how the wind passing through the trees sounded like a door opening. It was this constant creaking sound, like doors constantly opening around me, and, being alone in the forest, it felt really creepy at the time. I remember wondering if there was really a house somewhere nearby. But it was also a very interesting experience, because it revealed a metaphor; a loose metaphor, where you can hear the echo of the final wood products from the living woods. The trees were actually recreating these familiar sounds that we hear everyday from a wooden door, a wooden drawer, etc., and so that made me want to replicate the feeling and the metaphor by creating a system; In order to have a feeling you need to create a sign system that will lead the viewer to ask certain questions and have an internal conversation to arrive at that feeling. But also, I want to scaffold this conversation through my art piece, because it is not necessary that everyone who will hear the creaking sound of trees will associate it with a wooden door without some prompting. So as I design the artwork, for me, it is important to emphasise this comparison between trees and the door, the built environment and the wild environment. So, this tends to be the process behind my work.

DS: *Would you say that there is a specific artist, or even an artistic movement that influences your work the most?*

MK: Yes! The fluxus movement, surrealistic cinema, and a lot of early media artists, like Nam June Paik, Jeffery Shaw, Christina Kubitsch, and others. They were people who showed a lot of interest in the emotional and cultural signs and the connotations of systems, especially technological systems. In the case of Nam June Paik for example, we see that he was making use of cameras and televisions, and things that are staples in our everyday lives, but he was creating art to raise questions on what they say about us and our society and what meaning they can create when placed in an unfamiliar context. For instance, one of his installations was a statue of Buddha watching a TV broadcasting a live-stream from a camera pointing back to him. So, this kind of work focuses on the metaphors built into a certain system and our interaction with it when these metaphors are placed in conflict with each other. There is a lot of experimentation with interfaces in these art pieces and they are very influential to me, especially the way they are scaffolding ideas around feelings.

DS: Boxes *(https://mkalra.me/Boxes.html), is another project of yours that seems to combine everything. It is a short comic book, it is interactive, and it conveys a lot of feelings. Also, I think since Tartu is a city of students, they could really relate with the story. Could you tell me a little bit more about it?*

MK: *Boxes* has a loose story about someone moving into and then moving out of a space. The main focus is the physical interaction between the reader and the book. You get to walk through it, until you reach the final page where you have to unfold the book to see the character's apartment after they're all moved in. In the end, you have to refold and pack the book up, just like the character must pack his boxes in order to move out. So again, the idea started with a feeling around moving out of one's home. The physical interaction of the book, and the manipulation of the pages contribute to the meaning-making process and feelings evoked around this personal narrative.

DS: *I have noticed that you are using a variety of media in your art. Would you consider including even more in the future? What would you say are some of the limitations when working with different material?*

MK: So, for my work I use many different materials and various tangible interfaces. I don't want to be limited to one medium, because each one in a certain respect is an interface which holds certain affordances that I can utilise to my benefit. In my understanding, an interface is, to some extent, a system encompassing sets of rules for accessing content, and based on that logic I use different media to build my own systems through my artworks, designing new interfaces.

The hardest medium for me to manipulate is film. I have done some works using film, but I find it hard to give it a formal twist while simultaneously using the medium in an accessible way people are used to. There is the issue of production value, meaning that it is quite challenging to create images with realism, or surrealism, and make the experience really immersive. I think that my limitations at the moment are mostly technical, or skill based if you will. I can do comics because I have been drawing since I was a small kid, but when I had to work with sound to create art for example, I stepped out of my comfort zone and it was not such an easy task. So, in the end I believe that I need to grow more as an artist, because my limitations lay in experience rather than in the nature of the media I use.

DS: *Moving the focus of the conversation a bit, how would you describe semiotics through your own experience? And would you say that semiotics is an apt method of approaching art?*

MK: I don't want to make such a bold statement to say that it is the only way, but at least in my personal experience it is certainly a significant part of my process, even when I did not know anything about semiotics, and I was using it unknowingly and instinctively. Having said that, I can see how semiotics might not be a very important part of the process for some other artists, especially if they are not aiming at triggering a dialogue or creating a strong correlation between meanings. I do think however, that even these other artists are applying some type of semiotic process, just a broader and vaguer one.

DS: *Would you say that semiotics developed to be a new tool for your artwork?*

MK: I do not know if a tool is the best word as much as a methodology. Having access to more literature and expanding my horizons through semiotics certainly helped me to 'unpack' my own sign processes. Getting familiar with other people's understanding of signs, different cultures' sign systems, the perception of various stimuli and their triggers, were all contributing factors. To be more specific and give an example, I've been thinking a lot about phobias around insects and bugs in the house. I talked to Professor Timo Maran about this, and even though I was approaching this phobia as a general phenomenon, my interest was certainly coming from my own fear first and foremost. However, I got to understand where this fear is coming from, connect it to biosemiotic notions, like the agency of other-than-human beings, and I discovered there is actually plenty of literature on the topic. This gave me a lot of inspiration, and showed me a way of combining these bio-feelings to my designs, expanding the horizons of my own methodologies as an artist.

DS: *Finally, I wanted to ask you if you have any advice for young aspiring artists with a point of view similar to yours?*

MK: It is hard to give advice, because I think the environment one grows into plays a significant role and influences the individual both as a person and as an artist. For example, I am coming from the US, which is a very capitalistic society, and apart from that I was heavily influenced growing up with comics, and not so much media art. In both of these contexts, one of the most important priorities is constant production. But during this frantic production, there is not much room for you to stop and think if what you're producing is good to you, or how to improve. You cannot have the mindset that "I will not call the artwork finished until I am truly in love with the final result". However this can be a very valuable thing; to be able to have work in a finished form, even if you're not in love with it, that you can show to other people and get their feedback. Through

feedback your work can improve much faster. It not only builds your momentum towards growth, but also creates a community around you that might influence and inspire you.

Perhaps a good general advice would be to try and build the skills necessary to execute your ideas. I mentioned earlier that I am lacking the technical skills to do a lot of what I would like to do, but when I think about myself two or three years ago, I realised that I did not have the engineering skills that I possess right now in order to create the things I make now. I started with simpler projects, and I kept pushing myself. Like now, a lot of the projects that I have in mind are tough because they involve some things that I have never tried before; but the process itself is going to improve my conceptual skills and give me hands on experience with new media. It might sound scary, but it really excites me, to find real things, existing in the world, and try to give them a new twist, making someone other than me feel something.

But to return to what I was saying about the environment you're in, I think especially in Europe there is much more leeway for just 'marinating' in ideas. And I think this is very valuable too, because even if you are not producing something you are thinking and you are developing your ideas while building up your conceptual skills. You can also get your ideas into conversation with other people and gather some initial reactions before you start producing your work. I have been continually surprised by how much people are actually willing to help you if you just ask. Because they have been in your shoes, and they know what it feels like.

DS: *That was a great closing point! Thank you so much for the incredible conversation, and I really urge everyone to check out your website https://mkalra.me, and all your projects!*

MK: Thank you as well!

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