

# Introduction: Popular Culture in a New Media Age: Trends and Transitions

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**Despoina N. Feleki**

Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece.

**Otilia Cuşa-Fulea**

Ovidius University in Constanta, Romania.

Nothing conclusive has yet taken place in the world, the ultimate word of the world and about the world has not yet been spoken, the world is open and free, everything is still in the future and will always be in the future.

(Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* 166)

As popular culture intersects with new media constellations, people's engagement with new media and social networks is breaking new grounds every day. People's practices and experiences are altering their relationship to cultural production, distribution, and reception, to their engagement with cultural civics as well as to their relationship with one another. Cultural Studies embraces the shifting networks of such interactions and investigates the empowerments of cultural emanations and social movements, by testing the newly acquired rights and the lately realized freedoms, while at the same time determining the more general risks and threats to social and private lives. In M. H. Abrams's *A Glossary of Literary Terms* (1999), the field of Cultural Studies is defined as

designat[ing] a recent and rapidly growing cross-disciplinary enterprise for analyzing the conditions that effect the production, reception, and cultural significance of all types of institutions, practices, and products . . . . A chief concern is to specify the functioning of the social, economic, and political forces and power-structures that produce all forms of cultural phenomena and endow them with their social "meanings," their "truth," the modes of discourse in which they are discussed, and their relative value and status. (53)

Within this swiftly evolving and widely encompassing field of study, in the age of digitized globalization, "culture is more profitably thought of in terms of 'fields,' 'flows' and 'knots' involving the continual hybridization of meaningful practices or performances in global space" (Barker 66). This new fluid 'space' allows for new media cultural practices to take place and for practitioners and participants to intervene and intermingle.

The collection of the latest contributions related to new media developments in the current popular culture scene for the interested readership of this Special Issue was a big challenge for the guest Editors. In an effort to unravel the vast potentialities as well as the limitations that define new media transitions and dictate twenty-first century cultural expression, we have tried

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to bring to the attention of the readers the status and value of the latest new media forces in a variety of communication practices that mark a number of shifts and bring an array of hybrid ‘text’ forms in conversation with the producers and the receiving audiences as to how popular culture practices converge with new media.

In his essay, titled “The Cultural Logic of Media Convergence” (2004), media scholar Henry Jenkins states:

Media convergence is more than simply a technological shift. Convergence alters the relationship between existing technologies, industries, markets, genres and audiences. Convergence refers to a process, but not an endpoint. Thanks to the proliferation of channels and the portability of new computing and telecommunications technologies, we are entering an era where media will be everywhere and we will use all kinds of media in relation to each other. (34)

Over the last twenty years, scholarly appreciations have been supported by the latest cross-disciplinary research in a constantly changing media landscape. Their aim has been to closely follow current technological and cultural shifts and study the effects of this media convergence that has transfigured emanations of popular culture as well as the many new forms of artistic production in tandem with the new reception endpoints for audiences.

While new spaces for ground-breaking research, expression, and renegotiation of cutting-edge technologies are created, new and innovative paradigms are enabled. Unavoidably, in such shifting technological and sociohistorical contexts, our perception of popular culture—the culture created by the people and for the people—currently vastly produced and highly appreciated in digital spaces, has also calibrated in order to include the new relations that bind cultural agents together and to appreciate the effects of corporatized mass production and consumption:

On the one hand, popular is connected with folk power and stories that emphasize the power of people to create literature for people. As such, the term popular acquires new extensions and adaptations within present participatory culture that allows the shift of focus from readers’ reception of literature and art to their active participation in them. On the other hand, popular connotes mass-consumption, corporatized profit, and standardization as a result of technological dominance . . . . (Feleki, Introduction, *Stephen King in the New Millennium* xvii)

As new levels of cultural participation are engendered, this ‘democratic’ right of audiences to intervene and create culture is gradually, but steadily, affecting people’s civil lives. The constant exchange of coded information supported by educational and cultural institutions (like universities, schools, libraries, and the entertainment industry), empowers the re-appropriation of roles among participating audiences in diverse communication events that take place in dynamic spaces and have diverse technological, educational, and social effects.

Conversely, there has always been a lot of concern in the public discourse regarding the effects of digital media on language, and on the English language, in particular. The academia was never short of a quick answer, with predominantly solid research, against such widespread

mythology that proclaimed the death of the English language, with the advent of the internet and the latest technologies (Baron 2000; Crystal 2006, 2007, 2011; Thurlow 2006; Eisenstein 2013; McCulloch 2019). And yet, what the digital revolution undeniably and unprecedentedly demonstrates is the ever-increasing importance of understanding digitally mediated creative expression and language use as quintessential for identity formation and meaning making in the context of continually emergent and hybrid linguistic activities in the new online transnational and translinguistic context.

Language is thus more than a formal code, a medium of communication or a repository of meanings. The fundamental use of language as a powerful semiotic tool has long been acknowledged in the literature to relate to its sociocultural contextual significance (Duranti 2004; 2011; Hymes 1964). It follows, then, that the relation between language structures and sociocultural information is indexical in the sense that the use of certain language structures shows specific cultural frameworks for thinking and feeling. Language is, consequently, viewed as a dynamic social practice that is constantly “contested” and “in a flux” among its users, whether experts or novices (Duff and Talmy 2011).

Hence, popular culture can open up to include always newer and greater possibilities of user-creator interactions and new media-generated artistic expressions. Their multiplicities allow a plurality of both original and remix voices that enhance our current “polyglot” reality, characterized by “polyphony,” a condition resembling Mikhail Bakhtin’s concept of novelistic dialogue, where the interplay of multiple voices stands out (6). Indeed, also informing Marshall McLuhan’s conception of the Media as extensions to our conscious bodies and selves (3-6), new media constellations are altering both our real and virtual realities and defining twenty-first-century popular culture performances.

Diversity, plurality, discontent, and protest, easily finding an outlet in innovative cultural practices, can now be expressed in online public spaces. For any take on culture and cultural production is political. It “stresses the intersection of power and meaning with a view to promoting social change and improving the human condition” (Barker 67). The media that determine the thoughts and actions of people and society have always been inherently political and new media certainly hope to remain so. Social and civic struggles, renegotiations of freedoms in tandem with debates about identity formations and gender politics begin to take shape online and, then, inevitably, extend and move offline. Reportedly, new media support bond building and active engagement, with online social networking taking the credit for cultivating strong political reactions. Pablo Gerbaudo’s *Tweets and the Streets: Social Media and Contemporary Activism* (2012) constitutes an enlightening account on how new media platforms, like *Twitter* and *Facebook*, have had an instrumental role in steering new forms of protests and redefining ‘public space’ through the example of social protestations, from the Arab Spring to the ‘indignados’ protests in Spain and the Occupy movement. As the internet turns into the primary superhighway for the reception, production, and dissemination of information, for cultural production, and services, diverse cultural ‘texts’ become the ‘vessels’ for the communication of new ideas. Through these vessels people exercise their active engagement as well as their ‘voice’ in order to speak out for issues of social concern.

With the repercussions of digitality on narrativity, storytelling is also taken to new levels, expressed in transmedia stories that unfold in multiple formats and converge across different media. Due to this highly appreciated immediacy, challenging paths are broken towards novel

investigations of fact and fiction, multimodality, and multivocality, forcing us to revise our appreciation of the world around us. Making the most of this enriched media ecology, the entertainment industry has been redistributing the power between producers and consumers, enabling mainly instances of co-creation and co-authoring, involved in collective rather than individual projects as by-products of vibrant online fan communities (such as *Fandom* and *4Chan*).<sup>1</sup> In such media-enhanced spaces, new communication pathways are created with audiences feeling the need to have the necessary tools in order to intervene in creative instances of multitasking, from blogging to co-producing open access material (Feleki, *Wikia*). In doing so, the reader, the writer, the participant, and the fan come to the fore, taking an active role in ongoing renegotiations of power relations, enjoying great opportunities for agency and empathy building.

It is at the very heart of such communalities that emergent and hybrid linguistic activities are born in new online transnational contexts. Linguistic and cultural competences are thus developed through everyday interactions in distinct communities of practice by socialization through the use of language and socialization to use language (Schieffelin and Ochs). The affordances of new media revisit such well-established tenets of language socialization research in the acquisition of proper language use, of social competence as well as of language use as a medium or tool in the socialization process within popular cultural production (and in digital fandoms, particularly). Literate and social engagement in the digital space involves a fluid process of meaning-making that works against some fixed, monocultural standards. The rise of popular culture studies and the inclusion of popular culture courses in universities and school curricula testify to the need for further investigations into the changing faces of the twenty-first-century popular culture. The cross-cultural approach takes a balanced perspective on such interactions between culture and language in the process of learning and teaching in that its concern with cultural specificity can bring more relevant evidence on socialization and the way it occurs in culturally meaningful learning spaces.

When it comes to Education, in the last two decades, research has also focused on the ways digitality has been affecting cognition, not only limiting its scope to the novel ways teachers pass on information and learners receive it, but also opening up the discussion to address the multiple ways all agents in learning environments relate to it. The learners' relationship to communication technologies does not merely entail collecting information and reassembling it, but creatively redistributing among others and among their school communities. In *Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture: Media Education for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (2006), as part of The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation Reports on Digital Media and Learning, Jenkins contributed towards a better understanding of the great opportunities that participation releases, also drawing attention to the risks and limitations of digitality in all aspects of cultural life and cultural institutions. Digitality is, indeed, informing notions of teaching and learning related to rapidly-evolving technological and social changes with reports on the new skills and competences as well as on the benefits gained from the learners' engagement in social learning.

Kress Gunther, who considered the effects of social, economic, communication, and technological factors on the future of literacy, in his seminal work *Literacy in the New Media*

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<sup>1</sup> *Fandom* constitutes the perfect example of the interesting intersection between the entertainment industry and the fan, it being a fan community that reportedly provides “a home to explore, contribute to, and celebrate the world of pop culture.” [www.fandom.com/about](http://www.fandom.com/about). Accessed 10 Nov. 2020.

Age (2003), in a more recent paper (for the purposes of the third seminar investigating “The educational and social impact of new technologies on young people in Britain”) widens the scope of digital literacies and their impact on learning and learners. He acknowledges new “cultural technologies of transcription” that include not only alphabetic script, but also the visual, the multimodal, and the oral, emphasizing both the great potential and the limitations involved. Taking all these developments into account, educational institutions have been driven into welcoming the necessary structural changes in order to respond to the latest technological and cultural challenges. By accepting their roles as both educational and cultural superhighways, they aim for a reorientation of educational practices that hope to arm critically and culturally aware and actively engaged young learners.

The main questions posed in “Popular Culture in a New Media Age: Trends and Transitions” have guided the hosted investigations that relate to the multiple ways new media textualities have been informing language, narrative, and representations in present-day mass-mediated American popular culture. Among other concerns, the essays in this Special Issue have aimed at addressing how digitally mediated visualizations and linguistic modes are forging new social bonds while reconfiguring Western Popular Culture in media-rich contexts. Seeing to the need for an interdisciplinary study of digital mediation and its effects on all instances of popular culture creation, reception, and re-appropriation, this thematic issue manages to provide the space for bringing together the most recent convergences that characterize and transform twenty-first century American popular culture emanations. It offers the chance for a multifaceted take on the issues raised, hoping to enable a dialogue between different but interrelated disciplines (such as Cultural Studies, Literary Studies, Translation Studies, and Film Studies) and perspectives. Supporting the premise that participation involves cultural and educational institutions in addition to affecting imaginative creation as much as civic engagement, this publication foregrounds the participatory and remix potential as its backbone.

The essays in this journal are dedicated to proposing new applicabilities of the aspects of participatory culture, initially discussed by Jenkins. They invite exciting conversations about how cutting-edge new media projects have come to reshape this malleable new media ecology as well as people’s relation to it. One of the basic arguments that most essays in this special issue share and put forward is that all mental processes as well as storytelling and educational practices remain in constant mutation and invite renegotiation on many levels. In emphasizing this being-in-a-flux-state, the contributors highlight the possibilities of negotiation as well as the need for inevitable compromise due to the new instances of cultural participation and creative intervention. These instances, as it is revealed, turn out to be both facilitating and hindering collaborative practices and communication, putting possible freedoms at risk (for example, the scholars do not fail to pinpoint the visible negative repercussions of toxic content and rampant hate speech taking full shape in online platforms).

A new multimodal, multicultural, and multilingual (yet possibly fragile) reality is thus celebrated by most scholars. In their essays, they also investigate questions of power in rich examples of language exchange that tend to shape identity via online presence and active participation in pre-and-post-production practices of popular culture material. By sharing the outcomes of cutting-edge experiments and the subversive appreciations of the new roles engendered, the scholars emphasize diversity and plurality in media textualities as well as in sociocultural practices. Their investigations of different narrative media (such as podcasts,

comics, webcomics, films, e-books, and multimodal books, to name a few) are varied in scope, focusing on instances of creative expression as well as on profitable re-appropriation of brand marketing activities, oftentimes directed by the industry and continued by the fans. They highlight the promising (but tricky) intersection of spreadable media—which help participating agents re-appropriate and share media content (Jenkins et.al.)—with the entertainment industry and educational institutions, through innovative techniques via open source material (made available via online streaming services).

As creators and directors are breaking ground with storytelling on new media platforms, fan cultures and their practices are moving to the center. A fresh look at formerly investigated comics, films, TV series and other works of popular culture is ventured by the scholars in this issue, often recognizing “agency”<sup>2</sup> as the freedom to make choices, recreate ideas and content, and, ultimately, attain individuation. Additionally, play is an essential element involved in online participatory practices. Examples of playful engagement with storytelling often direct the contributors’ appreciation of how digitality affects not only narrative and character structure but also the audience’s reception of and ludic engagement with both the fictional and the real world.

In this direction, Stefan Schubert, in “‘This Whole World Is a Story’: Popularizing Narrative Instability in Contemporary Film and Television,” offers a sharp take on what he calls “narrative instability” in combination with “ludic textuality” as the two trends in contemporary American popular culture that manage to make a conscious comment about their metafictionality and their constructed nature. Continuing Espen Aarseth’s considerations of ergodic literature, Schubert analyzes the ways in which ludic narratives (from *Twist* films to TV serials) have the potency to play with the viewers’ expectations. Through his thorough investigation of the film *Inception* (2010) and the TV series *Westworld* (2016), Schubert elaborates on how “narrative instability” and “ludic textuality” take narrative techniques to new levels, and increase the viewers’ engagement with the narrative, creating numerous perspectives, and, as a consequence, retellings of the story. As a result, moving ludic agency to the center seems to be triggering novel immersive experiences (similar to playing a video game). Also, touching upon Netflix services and current bingeing habits, Schubert explains how narrative complexity along with narrative gaps can force devoted viewers into active interaction with the story and the narration, contributing thus to Jason Mittel’s discussion of forensic fandom as well as to Jenkins’s conception of participatory culture.

In Ella Waldmann’s essay, “From Storytelling to Storylistening: How the Hit Podcast *S-Town* Reconfigured the Production and Reception of Narrative Nonfiction,” a gripping investigation of the convergence between novelistic and aural/listening tradition is ventured. Waldmann draws attention to podcast studies that have hoped to reconfigure the media landscape since podcasts offer the tools for such investigations which can blur the boundaries between fact and fiction. Through her research in a new genre, the *audio nonfiction novel*, she shares her observations about the 2017 podcast *S-Town* and sheds ample light on serial podcast listening, which, interestingly, resonates well with the serial killings under scrutiny in the essay. She introduces the promising connection between storytelling and storylistening as new forms of nonfiction writing come into being. These nonfiction narrative techniques that inevitably borrow

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<sup>2</sup> Janet Murray demarcates “agency” from the pleasure of interactivity and relates it to the ability to affect and change the fictional world, in her seminar book *Hamlet on the Holodeck: The Future of Narrative in Cyberspace* (1998).

from accepted novelistic tradition are characterized by an orality that shares connections with McLuhan's Global Village (24). In tracing the implications of the new genre in narrative practices, Waldmann manages to highlight the swiftly changing roles that bind the creators and the listeners in novel authorial practices.

Special space has been reserved for diverse examinations of identity formation through media and on new media spaces. Gender attributes, emphasized through comic visualization techniques, define one's identity and engage the readers in discussions about identity configuration and representation. Christina Dokou's essay, titled "From Hand-held to Haunt-held: 'Lesbian Continuum' Meets 'Infection in the Sentence' in Emily Carroll's Comics," addresses issues pertaining to female identity as well as to its representations in popular culture. In her intriguing piece, she explores the convergence between lesbian comic book tradition and digital mediation. What is particularly gripping is her playful reappropriation of the metaphor of the "lesbian continuum," transfigured into the sequential art of (web)comics. Dokou concentrates on the power of Emily Carroll's comic art to pinpoint the "infectious" relationship of the particular medium with literary tradition and, by extension, with the patriarchy. She explores how the old print medium of comics is enhanced by its new digital rendition. Thus, webcomics is understood as the continuation and enhancement of the comics genre, which can help nurture lesbian bonds, formerly suffocating under phallus. Her analysis emphasizes the importance of embroidering the visual elements prominent in digital technology with the strains of the socio-psychological dimension of female nature. Grounded well within but, at the same time, straying away from patriarchal literary tradition, Dokou explicates how Carroll's art creates the space for the "lesbian continuum," which Adrienne Rich originally spoke for.

Across different media and platforms, shifting roles and participatory potential are particularly revealing. Focusing on diverse material coming from TV and cinema productions to online scripting habits, the scholars in this issue discuss the rich tapestry of the shifting dynamics in production and consumption practices that may result in the decentering of power, in a tendency towards the deconstruction of the authors' original text as well as in the disruption of traditional conceptions, such as authorship, authorial intent, and spectatorship habits. It is the aim of Melenia Arouh's "Toxic Fans: Distinctions and Ambivalence" to manifest the dangers lurking at the emergence of a culture of fear that marks the struggles separating the industry from the fans (Fiske 46) (albeit the inevitable convergences) in online fluid spaces as fans acquire more visibility and, consequently, power. Arouh does not fail to highlight Frank Furedi's observation that there is a rising misanthropy enabled in participatory online spaces, while according to Joli Jenson, participatory and fandom practices are the outcome of a fragmented society and a fragmented individual. Arouh reviews a number of negative characterizations of fans, through a detailed etymological investigation of the word "toxic," with its roots in Ancient Greek and Latin. She explains how the terms toxic and toxicity are still applicable today, in a variety of on-and-offline sociolinguistic contexts, and guides the reader into an understanding of both disruptive and destructive manifestations of mainstream fan online practices.

Obviously, what most papers accept as center stage are the chain effects binding online practices and relationships. Two inviting explorations of the new boundaries of storytelling, which bisect into branding and consumer practices follow, examining the fluidity of audiovisual texts along with the new liberating potentials for characters, narratives, and fans. Katerina Marazi, in "*You've Become Part of a Bigger Universe. You Just Don't Know it Yet: Adaptation,*

Intertextuality and the Case of Total Branded Entertainment,” offers an original approach at the crossroad between adaptation, transmedia storytelling, and brand identity. Marazi tests the potential of a total entertainment playground, which encompasses practices and choices coming from top to bottom and from bottom to top. She elaborates on how storytelling is affected by novel marketing and branding practices, turning pop cultural characters and icons into fluid brand identities. Special focus is placed on the boundaries between fictional and real-life chronotopes possibly resulting in “cultural revisions” (Bryant 48). All in all, it is an arresting investigation of the effects of total entertainment as experienced by active fans, when intersecting with the branded product, drawing also our attention to the new concepts and practices that intertextuality has currently come to include.

Audience engagement creates stronger ties, affecting fan creativity and the proliferation of paratexts. Sotiris Petridis provides a fresh look at the interplay between conventional brand management strategies and innovative brand community practices. In his essay, “A Case for Joint Brand Management in Film and Television Promotion,” Petridis accentuates another facet of such viral brand marketing practices, which he calls “joint brand management,” in his words, a unified management design that includes both viral brand content and fan practices. He tests this proposed model across audiovisual works that mark the shift between analogous and digital film technologies and enable unofficial fan contributions. Petridis describes the different perspectives of the fan powers, involved in online marketing practices, which aim at brand identity building. His examples include viral content coming from the fans, which, apparently, have an impact on the branded product. In particular, through the case study of *Game of Thrones (GOT)* (2011-2019) and by examining fan artwork and memes, he demarcates the power that the fan-created content can have in the promotion and future of the branded narrative.

Available at the hands of the educational community is a plethora of open source tools and material. New participatory viewership habits—reliant on digital open source material and social media (such as *Facebook* and *YouTube*)—have been informing communicative and educational practices directly. In this direction, Aikaterini Gouleti, Giorgos Dimitriadis, and Michalis Kokonis, in “Exploring the Educational Potentials of Language Learning with Netflix Tool: An Eye-Tracking Study,” explore the educational potential enabled in the new media age, shedding light on the very promising convergence between home entertainment industry and eye tracking technology. Gouleti et al. present the results of their research program,<sup>3</sup> in which the viewer takes center stage, with the aim of exploring the educational potentials of a streaming service, like Netflix. The scholars share a thorough investigation of educational practices that relate to questions of visual attention and foreign language learning, taking into account both the potentialities and some possible limitations. Gouleti, Georgiadis, and Kokonis use empirical evidence obtained from their research in eye-tracking carried out in Greek primary schools. Sharing their conclusions on subtitling, they offer valuable insights into the new flexible power relations that bind the entertainment industry with the receiving audiences and the learners more particularly, while focusing on the crossroads between the industry and the free corporate interests. In this essay, not only are the audio-visual or the kinesthetic elements discussed but also the transformational role of language, as an intrinsic part of communication, is examined.

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<sup>3</sup> This research is carried out in the context of the project “Implementing Audiovisual Media in Education: Evaluation and Application of Eye-tracking Data” and is co-financed by Greece and the European Union.



The investigations in this issue are concluded by Thomas Mantzaris's contribution, titled "Multimodal Literature in the Age of Covid-19." Mantzaris provides an original perspective on the future of multimodal literature. Alert by the latest developments in health and educational institutions, Mantzaris addresses the burning issues of online accessibility of multimodal works and of possible readerly compromise in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. He expands the discussion to include other aspects that relate to metamedia techniques as well as to authenticity in the age of digital reproduction. As the essays in this issue have been focusing, basically, on screen-based creations, Mantzaris succeeds in bringing the print matter back to the readers' attention. His main focus is testing the limitations of writing materialities from print-bound multimodal novels to audiobooks and digital or ebooks. He manages to highlight the multiple layers when experiencing a multimodal novel, taking the haptic, the visual, the tactile as well as the virtual aspect into consideration. With this very interesting contribution, Mantzaris opens the way for further investigations in the materiality of digitally mediated and compromised works. His ruminations add to the other contributors' thoughts, relating to both the gains and the losses for popular culture and its receptions in the age of digital multi-mediation.

Digital media have thus undisputedly intensified and completed the process of blurring the boundaries between elite/high culture and popular/mass culture, as Sasha Pöhlmann reminds us in his very acute review of David J. Bolter's *The Digital Plenitude: The Decline of Elite Culture and the Rise of Digital Media* (2019). It is also the main argument of Bolter's study. On this well-founded premise, Pöhlmann argues, Bolter describes today's media-cultural moment in terms of the four dichotomies which mark the cornerstones of its spectrum: catharsis and flow, originality and remix, organic and procedural, and, finally, history and simulation. Pöhlmann introduces Bolter's contribution as twofold, as a historical-theoretical part as well as a more specific part of particular analyses, with the special note that the publication is supplemented by a useful companion website with additional material that could not be adequately represented in print or e-book form. Among a comprehensive set of concepts that Bolter discusses, the term "popular modernism" is what Pöhlmann considers to be of great effect, "to describe a peculiar kind of cultural paradigm shift that has ended the notion of paradigms," marked by the "importance of the new," "the breakdown of hierarchy," a "fascination with technology," and a "preoccupation with style" (Bolter 80). Also, Bolter does not fail to point out the new tendencies towards hacktivism (with the mentioned examples of Anonymous and *4Chan*), and the blurring "distinction between the individual and the group [as it] becomes less and less clear" (179). Bolter's main methodological take on the crucial convergence of populism and popular culture becomes thus for Pöhlmann "a useful lens through which various phenomena appear in relations that may not have seemed as evident before" (156) and constitutes an eclectic and sometimes fragmentary (yet well-written and accessible) account of such intersections beyond the simple, linear models of influence and hierarchy.

Vasileios N. Delioglani brings us back to more familiar ground with his in-depth review of Marina Grishakova and Maria Poulaki's edited volume *Narrative Complexity: Cognition, Embodiment, Evolution* (2019), a multidisciplinary approach to narrative, ranging from narrative studies, cognitive studies, popular culture, and new media. Proposed by Delioglani as a valuable tool for students and scholars of narrative studies as well as of media and cognitive studies, the volume advances the generous idea that narrativity is constantly reconsidered and reinvented, as it "may be inherent in a multitude of narrative-like forms" (Grishakova and Poulaki 15). He calls

our attention to the most significant contribution of the volume, to the acknowledgment of the multiple cognitive processes that take place in the human brain with every narrative experience, form, and practice that now appear “in, through, and across various media” (Delioglanis 159), while in constant evolution and mutation. As such, Grishakova and Poulaki’s edited collection of essays captures the complexity of broadly defined narrative forms and draws the readers’ attention to recent advances in the field of cognitive studies, focusing on the links between the cognitive aspects and processes of narrative reading.

Rounding up, the readers of this publication have been invited to reconsider and open up to what is ahead in terms of sociocultural, literary, and educational practices. If they have begun to reevaluate already settled conclusions about digital production, reception, participation, assimilation, and redistribution processes, then, the aim of this issue will have been met with success. At times of forced lockdowns, people have had to rethink stability, materiality, habits, and values as well as try to embrace all that the pre-pandemic world had excluded. Rather than accepting an inevitable sense of nostalgia for pre-digital practices, dialogue has been invited, revolving around the renegotiation of roles, the better understanding, and the re-appreciation of cognition processes and learning methodologies via innovative digital tools.

All the essays in this issue have considered the new potentials for applicability of the aspects of participatory culture, which Jenkins rightfully proposed. The experience of the reader/viewer/participant has been considered of primary importance in all the essays, which have focused not only on the audio-kinesthetic and visual elements ingrained in the digital technologies but also on the transformative role of language in the reevaluation of social perceptions and constructions. Their great value lies in their aptitude to point out both the great potential of open source technology and the challenges of open access, in other words, to raise awareness about the potential new media have when eradicating barriers, while, at other times, struggling to raise them in an effort to secure lost freedom and territory.

Such developments call for a constant study of the shifts in policies, taking heed of the newly emerging and swiftly changing digital culture. One cannot deny that so much media content, so many cultures, and traditions are converging, while, simultaneously, diverging to new directions and giving way to new paradigms. So many spaces still remain uncharted and constant demands for change are made. What cannot be denied is the need to continue to evince the results of all kinds of shifts as scholars and practitioners constantly assess the validity of their claims, continuing to investigate open source technology while on the alert for the possible challenges.

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