Will Kentucky Route Zero Take You to Twin Peaks? Tracing the Narrative of the American Weird

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In this article, I analyze the narrative of Kentucky Route Zero in search of tropes and constructive principles already known from Twin Peaks. I seek to find out how interactivity of the game adds to these tropes and techniques, and whether we can project our findings about its interactive hypertextual narrative back to Twin Peaks. I suggest that, in both cases, the fictional world largely emerges from the interaction with the audience that actively interprets the narrative and extends it far beyond the 'tangible' text. Furthermore, the authors explicitly call for such involvement by introducing self-reflexivity and metacommentary in their work. I conclude with the perspective of the American Weird setting, implemented in both 'story worlds'; it can engender new meanings that surpass the linear logic of narration.

Introduction: Twin Peaks as the Point of Departure

Since its premiere in 1990, *Twin Peaks* has transformed the experience of consuming popular media, particularly television (see e.g., Barrett 2017; Boulègue 2017; Mittell 2015), not just for its fans, but also for the generations to come. This cult TV series remains one of the most influential texts in experimental storytelling, not least due to its unique fictional universe ('story world'). In addition to television and film, the legacy of Twin Peaks can also be discovered in video games, as confirmed by many dedicated lists compiled by game critics. One particular game, *Kentucky Road Zero* (Elliott, Kemenczy, and Babbitt 2013), is frequently mentioned in such lists (Andriessen 2020; Green 2017; Seagrave 2017; Turi 2015;

Welsh 2020). This association may be even more surprising, as the game does not visually resemble *Twin Peaks*. The look of the game is minimalist and clean; it has very few 'cinematic' segments and heavily relies on text dialogues.

Image 1. Scene from *Kentucky Route Zero Act II* (2013). The main characters are waiting for a giant eagle to carry them away from the corporate Museum of Dwellings.

Image 2. Scene from the finale of *Kentucky Route Zero Act V* (2020). The look of the game became more sophisticated in the process of development, especially in its depiction of space.

Kentucky Route Zero (2013–2020) is an independently developed computer game in five episodes, referred to as 'Acts' in the game. These 'Acts', united by an overarching narrative, were released in a serial form between 2013 and 2020. They were accompanied by another five shorter interactive 'Interludes' and other additional media content such as short videos and music recordings. The authors and developers of the game Jake Elliott, Tamas Kemenczy, and Ben Babbitt formed a small company called Cardboard Computer; later, they partnered with the publisher Annapurna Interactive to bring the game to popular consoles (Elliott, Kemenczy, and Babbitt 2017) (Elliott et al., 2017). The game proved to be a creative success and gained a considerable fan following. Its official Reddit community exceeded 2,600 members as of May 2021, with approximately 800 discussion threads posted by developers and fans since February 17, 2013. The main writer of the game story, Jake Elliot, has been nominated for the 56th Nebula Award in the Game Writing category (SFWA 2021).

The game experiments with interactive techniques of storytelling and breaks several conventions, such as plot closure, to an aesthetically satisfying result. For instance, the point of view constantly switches between different characters, some of which never appear on the screen. This also makes it difficult to identify how much each player character is supposed to know about the mysterious story world that is full of secrets. Sometimes two focalization points for narration are actualized at the same time, represented by two streams of branching dialogues on the screen (see Fig. 3). As it is common in adventure games, dialogue choices do not affect the development of the main story; they seem to lead nowhere in most cases, revealing frequent disruptions of continuity and logic in the narrative. However, this discontinuity, which is responsible for numerous blank spaces in the story, is a deliberate aesthetic decision much appreciated by the core fan base of the game.
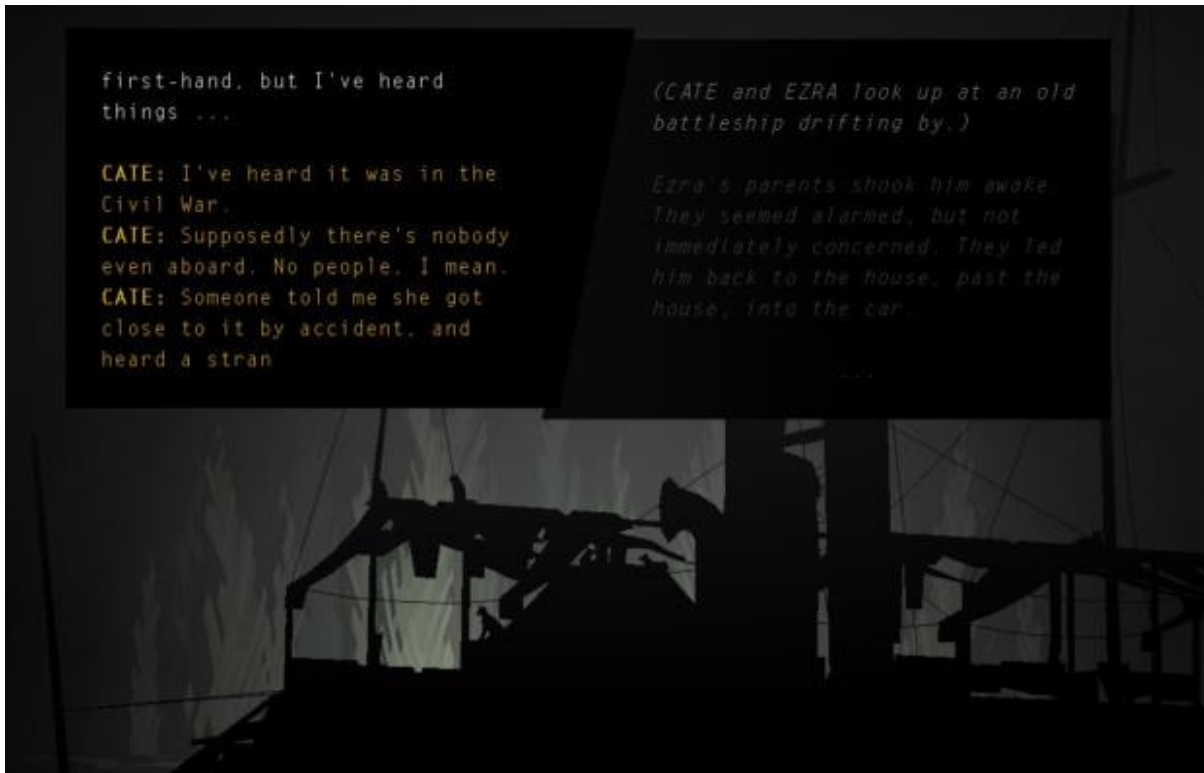
Image 3. Scene from *Kentucky Route Zero Act IV* (2016). A branching dialogue that constitutes the principal part of the game story is sometimes divided into two parallel tracks.

It can be argued that high artistic ambitions of the game's creators may have alienated a broader audience of players: some reviewers on Steam describe it as too much of an 'art house' (Renegade Master, 2020) and even "A collection of 'contemporary art exhibits ' masqueraded as videogame" (manola.mann, 2020). Despite all the blanks and dead ends (or maybe thanks to them, as we will see later) *KRZ* also has a thriving community of fans engaged into solving puzzles, interpreting and extending its fictional world, in the same way as *Twin Peaks* does.

Stop Making Sense: Fan Reading as 'Topological Analysis'

One of the first noticeable similarities between *Kentucky Route Zero* and *Twin Peaks* is the importance of online communities in solving the fictional mystery. Back in 1990, *Twin Peaks* was one the first TV shows to initiate early message boards and discussion groups such as alt.tv.twin-peaks; crucial analytical tools in active fan reading. Besides, it was one of the first cases in the history of fandoms to apply technologies of archival preservation (namely, VCR tapes) for the needs of collective meaning making (Jenkins 1995; 2003). New interpretations are sometimes derived from the smallest and, probably, random details discovered after

multiple replays of a particular scene. Jason Mittell describes this mode of analysis as 'drillable engagement', characteristic of so-called 'forensic' fandom (Mittell 2015, 289).

Ultimately, this mode of reading is similar to academic text analysis, and, first and foremost, classical philology. In the style of traditional literary scholars, fans drill into all possible references and influences (intertext), establish meaningful connections to the media that accompanied the game (hypertext) and inspect the artefacts within and beyond the game that would shed light on the production of the text (metatext). This mode of inquiry acknowledges the 'intertextual landscape' that surrounds the original text and construct a 'rhizomatic' structure of meanings that fans traverse in their active co-creation of the enigmatic narrative. However, unlike academic researchers, fans do not care about the potential hierarchy of signs and meanings of 'high culture' (e.g. Jenkins 2003).

In the case of *Kentucky Route Zero,* such a reference would be *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (Elliott, Kemenczy, and Babbitt [2020] 2020); early Surrealist cinema can serve as an example in the case of *Twin Peaks* (Boulègue 2017). These references are acknowledged and often admired by fans, but they are as good for solving the mystery as any film goof. Similarity and connectedness are the most important factors, valued even more when totally unexpected.

In literature studies, the term 'topos' ('topoi') is used to denote common topics, shared tropes and borrowed motifs that appear in different works throughout the cultural history, especially in the German philology and the Russian scholarship that inherited from it, which can be seen in Bakhtin's works (Somoff 2015). Recently, the concept of 'topos' has been rediscovered and applied to adventure games in transmedial story worlds (Schmidt 2020); we will return to the updated version of this concept later.

The search for 'topoi' holds a special place in the academic *Twin Peaks* scholarship, as well: we may find elaborate investigations on what 'food', 'clowns' (Boulègue 2017, 137–60) or 'air' mean (Rooney 2018) in the context of the show. Moreover, fan-driven analysis seems to be rather 'topologic' in connecting common places into a larger, not necessarily 'true' or 'objective', but often highly engaging perspective of a fictional world (see Boulègue 2017 for fan-driven cultural analysis; or Rosseter 2019 for purely fan analysis). We, as well, might want to indulge ourselves into the hunt for shared 'topoi' in the worlds of *Twin Peaks* and *Kentucky Route Zero*. For example, the power line is an important location in *Twin Peaks*

Season 3 (and electricity in general carries many meanings in its world), and we also see a similar silhouette of a power line in the first scene in *Kentucky Route Zero*.

The game starts at the gas station in Act I, and the gas station is the place that spawns Evil in *Twin Peaks Season 3*. The gas station in *Kentucky Route Zero* is called Equus Oils. It has a giant horse head on the roof, which reminds us of the Silver Mustang casino. However curious, these are probably coincidences: Act I of *KRZ* was released in 2013, and *Twin Peaks Season 3* premiered in 2017. We may still ask ourselves about the common source of these 'topoi', as well as many others, which would require us to 'zoom out' and look at these two stories within the larger 'intertextual landscape' of media.

Intertextuality: as Deep as the Code Goes

Studies of intertextuality in cinema started as traditional 'toposforschnung', but soon went beyond the search of similar imagery or motifs. In the most influential Russian work on intertextuality in cinema, *The Memory of Tiresias* (1998), Mikhail Iampolski criticizes this ambition of creating quasi-universal 'symbolariums' of cinematic images. Instead, he connects the ability of the viewer to create a cohesive narrative to their memory about previous cultural texts. He writes: "The semantic fullness of any text is surely the result of its ability to establish a connection with the texts that came before it, and occasionally with those that came later" (Iampolski 1998, 8).

Such perspective places particular importance on the viewer who inevitably perceives the film through the lens of their experience with other media. Following the footsteps of Mikhain Bakhtin, Iampolski understands intertextuality as the transformative field of meanings at the intersection of <the perspectives of> the author and the reader (Iampolski 1993, 34, absent from the English edition). Umberto Eco offered a similar model of intertextuality, recently adopted for digital transmedia realms by Hanns Christian Schmidt (Schmidt 2020, 109).

Intertextuality – connectedness to the previous texts through the previous experience of the audience – is an important feature of every work of postmodernism. *Twin Peaks* is generally characterized as a postmodernist narrative that builds on a multitude of previous works and genres (e.g. Geller 1992). Demonstrating even higher self-awareness (probably required at this stage of development of the relatively underexplored medium of a video game), *Kentucky*

Route Zero explicitly connects itself to the tradition of postmodernist literature. Its style is described as 'magical realism' in the official Steam store, due to its references to *One Hundred Years of Solitude* by Gabriel García Márquez. Its developers confirm the connection, and frequently mention this novel as a source of inspiration (e.g. Han 2020).

The names of characters in *KRZ* encourage further intertextual investigation, as illustrated by its substantial Fandom Wiki. Cousins Shannon and Weaver, two important characters in the game, are both named Márquez. Moreover, Shannon's name is most likely a reference to the mathematician Claude Shannon ("Shannon Márquez" 2014). Another important character is named Lula Chamberlain; her second name hints at William Chamberlain, the author of the surrealist novel *The Policeman's Beard Is Half Constructed* (1984) and the developer of the artificial intelligence program *Racter* (1984) that allegedly wrote that novel. Furthermore, the intertextuality of *KRZ* stretches beyond the text presented to the player: its fans have discovered a reference to the novel in the game's files ("Lula Chamberlain" 2014). The 'forensic' fandom has literally taken the game apart in search of shared 'topoi'.

In addition, this is where we may (or may not) find another reference to the work of David Lynch: Lula's first name could be a reference to one of the two main characters in Lynch's film *Wild at Heart* (1990), is a story of two lovers, Lula and Sailor. In *Kentucky Route Zero*, Lula acknowledges the romantic feelings of her former colleague Joseph but does not want this relationship at this point.

Image 4. Scene from *Kentucky Route Zero Act II* (2013). Lula Chamberlain is shown reading a rejection letter, probably a parody of the academic review process.

Hypertextuality: The Garden of Forking Dead Ends

The common understanding of hypertextuality starts with non-linearity of hypertextual works: they are often comprised from relatively independent fragments that can be consumed in a different order. Another frequent feature is the use of different media on one hypertext, such as, combining text, film and interactive (executable) programs (Bell 2010). From this perspective, *KRZ* is certainly a hypertext, complemented with Interludes that are included as a part of playing experience but do not move the story forward. The hypertextuality of *Kentucky Route Zero* does not end here: WEVP-TV, the fictional TV studio featured in Act IV, has its own website and several hours of original content ("WEVP-TV Broadcast History" 2017).

Even though the ending will not change depending on the choices made by the player, there will be slight, often purely poetic, differences in the game's dialogues and scenes depending on the specific path through the dialogue choices and the scene sequences taken by the player. Thanks to this, *KRZ* makes an outstanding example of a linear but productively replayable game: in the end, we are left wondering what has actually happened, and we may want to replay different sequences in search for clues. Moreover, a dedicated player would go

through all available content in the game to unlock additional achievements, while learning more about the strange world of ghosts in the static and underground bird songs featured in Interludes. Significantly, this is also how dedicated viewers engage with the complex story of *Twin Peaks: The Secret Diary of Laura Palmer* is one popular supplementary text to explore its world (see e.g. Mittell 2015, 299). Mittell refers to this book as one of the first canonical examples of 'diegetic extension' in American TV: an object from the story world enters the real world to extend the fictional universe.

KRZ features at least one 'diegetic extension' in the form of a separate digital artifact. Extending the universe of the game into the real world, Junebug, the fictional character from *KRZ*, has released a real-life album of aerial synth pop ("ambient whisperwave", according to the fictional musicians themselves), on Bandcamp in 2020 (Junebug 2020). Unfortunately, the album is only available as a digital download, although Bandcamp also supports distribution of physical music records. However, it sets itself aside from the conventional forms such as an official soundtrack or even a rather paratextual interpretation of it by fans, such as interpretation of music from *Twin Peaks* by the band Xiu Xiu (Xiu Xiu 2016)). Even though we know that the music was written by the developers of the game, it is published in a way that suggests that the singer, Junebug, actually exists in our world.

The signature track from the album, "Too Late to Love You", first appeared in Act III of *Kentucky Route Zero*. The song itself is a playable artifact in the game: the order of the lyrics depends on the player's choices. In this way, the medium of a video game provides a unique opportunity for active involvement, although in a much more rigid scripted form than free interpretation of the text in the imaginary space between the reader and the writer/producer.

Image 5. Scene from *Kentucky Route Zero Act III* (2014). Performance of Junebug and Johnny at The Lower Depths, a bar reminiscent of Twin Peaks' Bang Bang Bar.

The performance of Junebug and Johnny at the bar, The Lower Depths, in Act III — one of the most beautiful scenes in KRZ — is easily identified as a reference to *Twin Peaks* by its fans (as some of the game critics also note: see Turi 2015; Williams 2014). The ethereal music style, the visual palette, and the context of a night bar are reminiscent of Julee Cruise's performances in all three seasons of the series.

Self-Reflectivity: The Randomness is What Makes it Realistic

Twin Peaks has always been self-reflective about being a TV show (see e.g. Geller 1992), and its metatextual quality has only amplified with time. One of the key scenes to express this self-awareness is smashing a television set at the beginning of *Fire Walk with Me.* This scene explicitly communicated the departure of David Lynch from the genre conventions of television (see e.g., McAvoy 2019; Joseph 2017). In a more recent example, Season 3 shocks the viewers with the gruesome death of two lovers. The young man's work is to watch a shiny glass cube with vacuum inside that is also a portal to an alternative world — obviously, symbolic television. Agent Cooper himself appears in it at some point, when no one is watching, and this can also be a self-reflective gesture from Lynch; pointing at the expectations of his devoted audience who want 'the old Cooper' back. Meanwhile, the

broader authorial ambition here is to show something that will figuratively blow its audience's minds, as it literally, and shockingly, happens to the viewers inside the fictional world of the TV series.

As we have already observed in the example of *The Policeman's Beard Is Half Constructed,* the novel supposedly written by an algorithm and referenced in the game, *Kentucky Route Zero* contains many particular references to the history and the process of video game development, also adding a level of metatext to its narrative. The first character whom Conway, our first point-of-view character, encounters at the beginning of the game, is Joseph, a former game designer; one of the first things that Joseph does is to invite Conway (and the player) to the cellar where three ghosts, the recurrent characters named Emily, Ben and Bob, are playing a mysterious tabletop game. This game immediately invites us, the players, to see it as a model of the actual game we are currently playing. The fictional players describe it in the following way: "The randomness is what makes it realistic", which may also be read as the key to *KRZ*'s own creative success.

Kentucky Route Zero is self-reflective about being a video game, so much that it becomes one of its major plot devices. Much of the game's events revolve around the artistic research project XANADU that Joseph, Lula, and their colleague Donald undertook many years ago when they worked as project researchers at the university. Another important character, the already mentioned young mathematician Weaver Márquez, was also involved in the project as a disposable intern, which might or might not have led to her early demise. The university funding was not enough to finish the project, and the researchers parted their ways (note the critique of the 'merit-based' academic evaluation in Fig. 4). This part of the story supports the societal critique that forms the core message of the game.

One noticeable difference between *Kentucky Route Zero* and *Twin Peaks* is that the former asks much more straightforwardly political questions. Even in its most enigmatic Season 3, *Twin Peaks* still represents probably the most straightforward contemporary version of the universal fight between Good and Evil in their purest and most abstract form. For comparison, in *KRZ*, the greatest evil is represented by the Distillery, to which the inhabitants of Kentucky are indebted. The Distillery is yet another symbol of capitalism that drives the conflict of the overarching story across five acts and seven years in development. This does not make a very surprising discovery, although the fans of the game highly admire its political message. In the final Act V, the characters seem to arrive at a better world where

they may hope to build a sustainable community after the flood. Still, two innocent horses will die in the end, no matter how well you play.

Metatextuality: Invitation to a Beheading of the Author

On this journey to a better future, the mission of Joseph, Lula and Donald is one of the mysteries that the player needs to uncover. According to the common interpretation of the game's story, the goal of the project was to build a machine that documents the process of its own creation in the form of an interactive game with multiple possible endings. In Act III, the player learns that before wrapping the project up, Joseph, Lula and Donald undertook a scary trip into another world that may or may not have been the virtual world of the game inside the machine.

Whatever happened during that trip (there are different options), the project seems to have failed at the point of time when the player had first entered the game. At the fictional time point when the player enters the game, Joseph works at a gas station, Lula works as a clerk at a Bureau, despite her artistic talent and ambitions. Eventually, we find Donald in the cave, which he named Hall of the Mountain King – another musical reference to the piece by Norwegian composer Edvard Grieg for the play *Peer Gynt* (1867) by Henrik Ibsen. This reference suggests that Donald expects supernatural troll-like entities to help him repair the computer and relaunch the mysterious XANADU.

In the universe of *Twin Peaks*, we find a predecessor to XANADU in the Blue Rose group lead by Gordon Cole (played by David Lynch himself). In both cases, the figure that stands for the external author is limited in their knowledge about the fictional world – and yet, they know everything somehow. Joseph, the former leader of the XANADU project, is blind; Gordon Cole of the Blue Rose secret society is almost deaf. In both cases, their impairment symbolizes their ability to penetrate supernatural mysteries: a 'topos' that can be traced to Greek legends. To make this connection clear, one of the options for the name of the dog that accompanies the protagonists in *KRZ* is Homer.

Moreover, these ambiguous metatextual 'author-characters' take a special place in the narrative. They seem to have the external knowledge about the making of the fictional world we found ourselves in, and they actively initiate the quest of the main protagonist to uncover the fictional mystery. Their role in the narrative is to destabilize the position of the 'reader'

and to remind them that, by consuming these texts, the audience also participates in a collaborative game of meaning making (which also includes the author of this article). In *KRZ*, Donald has even authored a research paper titled "Literary Multitudes: Hypertextual Narrative as Poststructural Witness". Unfortunately, this article does not exist in our reality, despite our burning wish to refer to it.

Among many others, a rather minor but highly self-reflective question is whether artistic research and the arts in general can be offer a viable career when funding for it is driven by business logic. The decline of the arts in a profit-oriented social system becomes a recurrent theme: another member of the XANADU project, Lula, has not realized her artistic ambitions, although her sculpture showed much promise, as we learn from yet another interlude, an installation of her artistic work. Furthermore, when the players pass the conference hall in the Kafkaesque castle of the Bureau of Reclaimed Spaces, they unlock a peculiar achievement: a bearded, barefoot person plays a beautiful piece of music on the organ. This character's name is Will, and he appears later in the game on a boat named Mucky Mammoth; he used to teach French literature and drama at a university but his department (of course, in the humanities) was dismantled as a result of budget cuts. This leaves us, the academic audience, with far too familiar real-world concerns, but also with the homely feeling of belonging into the narrative of the game.

'Cybertextuality': the Player as a Hypertextual Witness

Does it matter, in terms of the narrative, that *Kentucky Route Zero* is a video game? Its metatextual references firmly locate it within the discourse of narratology in new media, even though its actual playability rarely exceeds conventional interactivity. However, the name Xanadu may be a reference to one of the first hypertext novels *afternoon, a story* (1990) by Michael Joyce, which also mentions the location named Xanadu. After the players discover XANADU in the game, they are invited to engage in an archaic textual adventure game within the game – a homage to the influential historical landmark, *Colossal Cave Adventure,* (1977) that the writer of the game Jake Elliott used to play as a child (Han 2020). The choices made in this small game within the game affect the dialogue and the interpretation of *KRZ* in general. The player character can even die in this nested game, although this is presented as an achievement in the actual game, accompanied with a condescending line: "Your score was 0 out of a possible 8192".

This may be the rare case when the playing scholar can actually get the essential experience of an old school textual adventure that is explicitly required to be able to understand the whole concept of 'cybertext' (Aarseth 1997, 2). The concept of 'cybertext' has been proposed by the game studies scholar, Espen Aarseth, to present a new perspective on non-linear texts, first and foremost, in literature and games (Aarseth 1997). According to Aarseth, a cybertext is the exemplary representative of an 'ergodic' text, the text that requires a "non-trivial effort" to make sense of it due to its physical properties in the material world. Eye-movements and page-turning would count as a 'trivial' effort: a non-trivial effort would be, for example, selecting one of the many different dialogue options in a hypertext fiction, or, ideally, typing lines of text to advance the electronic game. The ideal 'cybertext' is a machine by itself, "a mechanical device for the production and consumption of verbal signs" (Aarseth 1997, 21), – just like the fictional XANADU.

Kentucky Route Zero simulates exactly this kind of interactive experience with its exquisitely written and designed branching dialogue trees. Furthermore, it offers even more creative ways to invite user input that generate unexpected feedback loops. The 'reader' of the game is invited to complete its 'text' in many different ways that often reference old or obsolete media artifacts, such as simulations of a textual adventure game, an AM/FM radio receiver, and an old phone connected to an automatic answering line in one of the Interludes. The player can press buttons with numbers on the phone to access the information about the mysterious Echo River, receive traveling tips, and other information such as "Catalogue of subterranean bird songs". The conversation takes unconventional turns when the voice on the telephone suggests options such as "If you are holding a snake right now, press 4", and then asks "How do you think the snake feels?". This is a characteristic example of the overall surreal mood of the game: after a number of similar occasions, we start accepting the whole world of KRZ in its entire weirdness.

This assumption may help us to shift our perspective from singular recurrent signs and themes to a larger picture of the story world as a particular 'topos'. As Schmidt suggests, the concept of 'topoi' in serial transmedia can be read twofold: as a vocabulary of particular recognizable 'common places' in an intertextual landscape and as a fictional 'setting' in whole (Schmidt 2020, 109). Besides, panning from regular recurrent tropes ('building blocks') to the repeated structural characteristics of the whole world (setting), we also acknowledge our metatextual position in relation to a specific transmedial universe, as well as our ability to expand it.

It is important where the story takes place, not just the vocabulary that is used to tell it. The player conceives the non-trivial topology of Kentucky Route Zero and its surroundings by navigating its ergodic maps that present additional puzzles and challenges[1]. It may take a while to reach all locations when driving the van in Act I, but then the rules drastically change when the characters travel across the same map on the back of the giant eagle Julian. The map of the game world was two-dimensional at the beginning of Act I, but it suddenly becomes three-dimensional at the end of it. Consequently, this peculiar way of mapping fails to create a continuous mental model of the story world, despite the many clues it provides. Similarly, to an extent, this is characteristic of the world of *Twin Peaks*, despite this town being firmly located in a recognizable region of the US, with its material and spiritual surroundings thoroughly mapped. Both *Twin Peaks* and *Kentucky Route Zero* are 'topoi' by themselves, and both of them belong to the same narrative 'setting'. It is the surrealist, horrifying, and yet, homely and believable world of imaginary 'dark Americana', best represented by the trademark 'Lynchian *noir*' (Sheen and Davison 2004).

Both fictional worlds have blossomed on the same fertile ground of modern American mythology, defined by the great American Dream and the current reality of 'the American nightmare', as Sionhan Lyons describes it (Lyons 2017). Rachel Joseph labels this re-enchantment of the mundane American reality in *Twin Peaks* as 'the Northwest Weird' and explains it with the weirdness and the horror of reality itself. In her words, "the "weirdness" of the world and performance of Twin Peaks is the weirdness of reality itself" (Joseph 2017, 66).

As Lyons writes, the American nightmare is often understood as the American Dream destroyed by male-enacted violence and darkness. It is the answer to both the American Dream, embodied in the comfort of roadside diners and the famous cherry pie, and the American Nightmare, embodied in the real-life figure of the serial killer Ted Bundy. By choosing this third option, the fictional worlds in the American Weird setting surpass the linear logic of narration and engender an abundance of novel poetic and political meanings. They may not provide freedom of choice mechanically (as in a hypothetical adventure game with endless choices), but they do it conceptually instead, envisioning the way to escape from the American Horror when the American Dream ceases to come true.

Conclusion and Discussion: Is Everything a Cybertext Now?

One of the biggest mysteries of *Kentucky Route Zero* is its inconclusive ending. The supposedly main conflict between the hellish Distillery and the people of Kentucky is never resolved. Even more mysteriously, this does not prevent its numerous fans from enjoying it. The same can be said about the multimedia compendium of television, film, writing and music that is *Twin Peaks* today. In both cases, the authors encourage free interpretation of their art (see Sheen and Davison 2004, 3 on Lynch), and this process is particularly active in online fan communities. The quest, or the investigation, never brings the protagonists close enough to the answer. The ends are never tied together – rather, they multiply like Hydra's heads. There is no key to this puzzle, at least, in the authorial intent, but the absence of a finite answer only extends the pleasure.

In the ideal cybertext, there are many paths throughout such text, and choosing one way eliminates the possibility of the plot resolved otherwise. Aarseth refers to this contradiction as 'aporia' (Aarseth 1997, 91). However, there is no 'aporia' in *Kentucky Route Zero*: alternative choices may reveal more beautiful poetic lines and scenes (such as the organ concert or caring for the unfamiliar snake), but they do not have any influence on the main conflict of the story between the people of Kentucky and the diabolic Distillery. From this perspective, *KRZ* remains a rather linear game with very little narrative 'aporia': it corresponds to the architecture of the vector with optional side branches, the most typical narrative structure, for example, in digitally augmented books (Ryan 2015).

The game scholar Souvik Mukherjee would categorize this type of a game as a 'monorail' narrative "where the entire sequence of actions is scripted quite restrictively" (Mukherjee 2018). Still, each replay would still present a unique 'reading' for each player, according to Mukherjee, even though the player's choices do not matter much, apart from the order and the tempo according to which the story develops.

In the end, can we imagine *Twin Peaks* as a 'cybertext'? It definitely has an element of 'aporia' in it: as long as the viewer believes that it was Leland Palmer who killed Laura Palmer, the intrigue is gone, and most of the show (probably the best part) stops making sense for this particular viewer. However, the fans of the show choose a different way to read it. Initially served to the passive 'voyeur' audiences of 'soap opera', Twin Peaks has evolved over more than 30 years of its presence in the global cultural memory. It most certainly

requires a non-trivial effort of perusing a wealth of manifold media artifacts to make sense in its current state. This makes it possible to interpret *Twin Peaks* as a "choose-your-own-adventure" book with many alternative explanations and even plot twists. The cryptic ending of Season 3 brings to the fore this tendency for the extreme and then just leaves it there: after almost 30 years with Laura Palmer, we still do not know her secrets. All we know is that her father once killed her against the will of her creator.

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Notes

[1] Maps are also important in *Twin Peaks*. Its complex topography has been mapped by the Native Americans in rock art. This map explains the world in its unity of natural and supernatural powers, and the relations between them, such as the Black Lodge and the White Lodge that represent Evil and Good. Lakes are also meaningful in the landscape around *Twin Peaks*, and we can find a variety of lakes on the map of *KRZ*.