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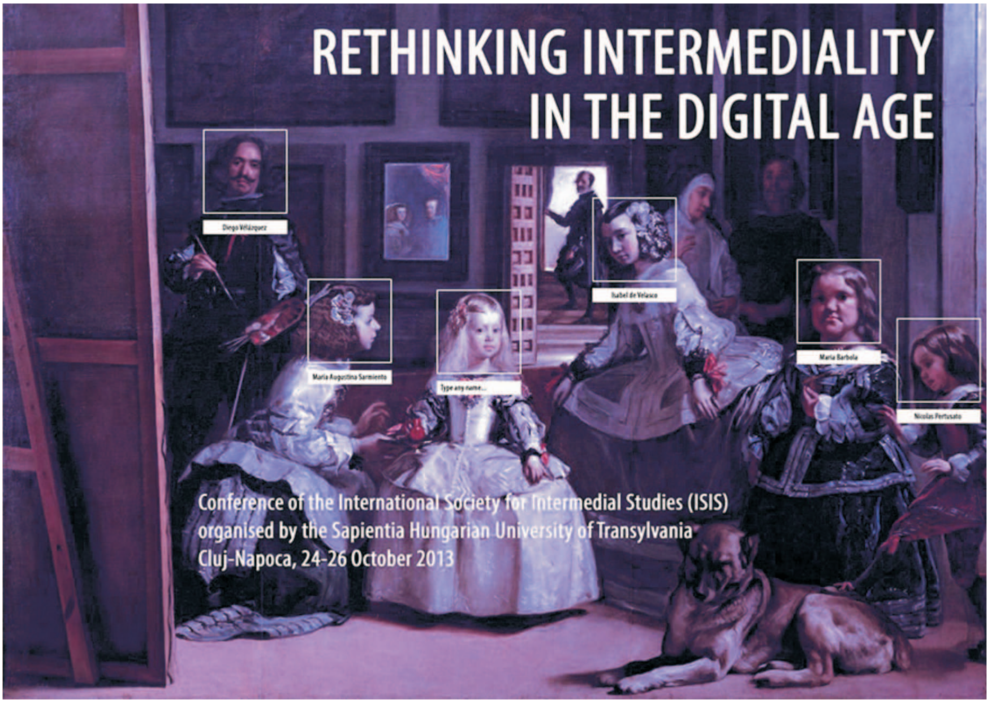
Rethinking Intermediality in the Digital Age


RETHINKING INTERMEDIALITY
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Conference of the International Society for Intermedial Studies (ISIS)
organised by the Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania
Cluj-Napoca, 24-26 October 2013

A selection of essays written for the inaugural conference of the International Society for Intermedial Studies, *"Rethinking Intermediality in the Digital Age,"* organized by the Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania, in Cluj-Napoca, Romania, between the 24th and 26th of October 2013. The conference also launched a new research project on intermediality supported by the National Research Council and the Executive Agency for Higher Education Research and Innovation Funding, Romania (CNCS-UEFISCDI, project nr. PN-II-ID-PCE-2012-4-0573).

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"All Over the Map:" Building (and Rebuilding) Oz

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Keynote talk given at the conference of ISIS (International Society for Intermedial Studies) "*Rethinking Intermediality in the Digital Age*" organized by the Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania, in Cluj-Napoca, Romania, between the 24th and 26th of October 2013. (The photos of Henry Jenkins illustrating the article were taken by Ágnes Pethő.)

Keywords: *Oz The Great and Powerful*, *The Wizard of Oz*, world-making, transmedia culture.

> "The story is in the world; not the other way around. That is to say, a world is big and hopelessly uncontrollable. It spills messily outside the edges of any one story […] The challenge of genres like science fiction and fantasy is to not only spin a good tale, but to invent for that tale an imagined backdrop that seems to stretch clear into the horizon."
>
> Travis Beacham (2013, n.p.) on the *Pacific Rim* franchise.

Disney offered *Oz the Great and Powerful* (Sam Raimi, 2013) to viewers as a spectacular world to map and explore far more than as a story to be experienced. One teaser ad showed the yellow brick road, heading past rambling green hills. Another showed a tornado carrying the hot air balloon to Emerald City. A final ad revealed an expansive vista showing an enchanted landscape, a haunted forest, two different castles implying rival kingdoms, a town made of china cups, and other film locations. The advertisements echoed the highly iconic campaign for Tim Burton's *Alice in Wonderland* (2010), a commercial hit Disney was eager to associate with its upcoming release. Both had been based on classic children's books, involving journeys into magical realms, and promising to show the traditional characters as we had never seen them before [Fig.1].

Critics objected to Tim Burton's radical rewriting of *Alice in Wonderland*, overlooking more than a hundred of years of "alternative Alices" (Sigler 1997), starting within months of the book's first publication. When *Oz the Great and Powerful* was first announced, some protective fans decried what were perceived as plans to develop a "prequel" to the beloved MGM musical. For many, *The Wizard of Oz* is a story, more or less what's depicted in the Judy Garland version, a distilled version of L. Frank Baum's first Oz novel. Dorothy is swept away from Kansas by a cyclone, lands amongst the Munchkins, kills the Wicked Witch of the East; she travels down the Yellow Brick Road, meets her three companions (Scarecrow, Tin Man, Cowardly Lion), and gets dispatched by the Wizard (really, a humbug) to kill the Wicked Witch of the West and returns home – there's no place like it! Let's call this the canonical story.

One of my students described *Great and Powerful* as "all over the map," unconsciously evoking Frank Kelleter's (2012) reference to the Oz Universe's "narrative sprawl." Precisely! By showing so much of Oz, the film inspires the collective activity of a global community of Oz fans who, as Kelleter notes, have worked continuously across the 20th century to construct "entire networked orders of knowledge about Oz," (2012, 34) stimulating pleasurable debates about what elements are canonical and which do not "belong." Let's call that network of information "Ozness." The film thus falls into the gap between narrow conceptions of the canonical story and the "Ozness" claimed by its more hardcore fans.

Over the past few decades, Hollywood and the games industry have developed more sophisticated tools for modeling and rendering synthetic worlds. Art directors and production designers are playing a more central role in the development of screen stories. DVD extras, coffee table books, and web-based encyclopedias and concordances document the particulars of these imagined worlds. Many contemporary filmmakers – Tim Burton and Zack Snyder come to mind – are more compelling world builders than storytellers. We need a better critical vocabulary for discussing their work. Yet, at the same time, many viewers and critics remain rooted in a classical aesthetic, which tends to view these detailed renderings as an excess ("eye candy") distracting from the hero's journey.

In *Film Art*, David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson (1990, 46) use the MGM Oz film to explain the concept of "function:" "Even an element as apparently minor as the dog Toto serves many functions. The dispute over Toto causes Dorothy to run away from home and to get back too late to take shelter from the cyclone; and later Toto's chasing a cat makes Dorothy jump out of the ascending balloon and miss her chance to get back to Kansas. Even Toto's gray color, set off against the brightness of Ox, creates a link to the black and white of the Kansas sequences at the film's beginning." In their hands, *The Wizard of Oz* becomes *the* textbook example of how tightly integrated each element is into the storytelling process. Every element has one or more functions to play or it doesn't exist at all.

Yet, competing logics also shape the film's design and the spectator's experience. Hollywood's growing focus on immersive screen experiences creates a context where world-building exists alongside, sometimes serving and sometimes privileged over storytelling as a source of meaning and pleasure. In discussing contemporary entertainment franchises, Derek Johnson (2013) suggests that these world-building practices might be understood as a form of "overdesign." Game designers incorporate affordances that any given player may never encounter and which may support emergent practices. Similarly, contemporary films and television series incorporate more details than any given viewer may notice, more than any given narrative will use, since a successful film may spawn sequels (or may extend into other media) and since this practice enables the continuation of a long-form television series. Just as Bordwell and Thompson have shown how each detail might serve multiple story functions, each detail also contributes in multiple ways (some unanticipated at the time of their creation) to the story world.

For both readers and writers, our experience of Oz is shaped by prior expectations that determine what kinds of stories we might tell and what kinds of characters we might encounter. The world of Oz emerged gradually, over several decades, as Baum himself kept returning to and adding onto its territory, and as subsequent authors took over and further extended Oz. Ultimately, the texts of Oz accumulated a vast set of characters and locations described in the printed books, visualized through their illustrations, and performed on screen, stage, or other media. Once we have a deeper understanding of how Oz functions as a world, we will consider two different strategies by which later authors attach themselves to that world – one focused on notions of nostalgic return (where the plots center around efforts to restore Oz to its former glory) and the other focused on the process by which Oz became the place we know in the canonical story. Both approaches work only if subsequent authors link their efforts to expand the Oz universe back to elements from the canonical story, while respecting the network of associations over which the most hardcore fans steward.

World-Making and World-Sharing

> "Imaginary worlds may depend relatively little on narrative, and even when they do, they often rely on other kinds of structures for their form and organization. [...] A compelling story and a compelling world are very different things, and one need not require the other."
>
> Mark J. P. Wolf, *Designing Imaginary Worlds* (2013, 3).

In a discussion of what film theorists might draw from the work of Nelson Goodman (1978), Dudley Andrew (1984, 38) explains, "Worlds are comprehensive systems which comprise all elements that fit together within the same horizon... These elements consist of objects, feelings, associations, and ideas in a grand mix so rich that only the term 'world' seems large enough to encompass it." Andrews stresses the underlying logic determining which elements belong in a particular world: "The plot may surprise us with its happenings, but every happening must seem possible in that world because all the actions, characters, thoughts and feelings come from the same overall source" (1984, 39). While much contemporary writing about world-building focuses on fantasy or science fiction, Andrews's prime example, Charles Dickens's London, suggests that the same concept might apply to realist or historical fictions. London is a real place with an actual geography and history, but Dickens's London is an imagined space, a particular set of choices about what to include, a set of interpretive norms about what to pay attention to as we read a story. Dickens's London is not the same as Arthur Conan Doyle's London, with those differences only partially explained in terms of the different genres within which their stories operate. Andrew (following Goodman) sees worlds as intertextual structures, which persist across works: "The world of Dickens is obviously larger than the particular rendition of it which we call *Oliver Twist*. […] In fact, it is larger than the sum of novels Dickens wrote, existing as a set of paradigms, a global source from which he could draw" (1984, 39). And, as we will see, from which subsequent authors (Sam Raimi in the case of Oz) may also draw.

From a similar starting point in aesthetic philosophy and narrative theory, Marie-Laure Ryan (2001) stresses what the expansiveness of imaginary worlds means for the reader, who must assemble bits of description (in a prose work) or visual details (in an audiovisual texts) to form a mental construct of the story world. She suggests that the viewer is "guided" by "textual declarations" but builds "this always-incomplete image into a more vivid representation through the import of information provided by internalized cognitive models, inferential mechanisms, real-life experience, and cultural knowledge, including knowledge derived from other texts" (2001, 91). This process of speculation, inference, and elaboration may continue beyond the borders of the original text. Umberto Eco stresses how fans transform a fragmentary and contradictory text, such as, his example, *Casablanca* (Michael Curtiz, 1942), into a cult object: "The work must be loved, obviously, but this is not enough. It must provide a completely furnished world, so that its fans can quote characters and episodes as if they were aspects of the fan's private sectarian world, a world about which one can make up quizzes and play trivia games so that the adepts of the cult recognize through each other a shared expertise" (1990, 198). Such details, as the names of Rick's doorman, may evoke the original story but may also inspire personal and collective speculations about what other kinds of events might occur in this cherished space. And, as Mimi Ito (2011) says of more recent examples from Japanese "media mix" culture, these details may facilitate social exchanges, as fans talk together and pool knowledge.

Also writing about production and consumption practices in Japan, Otsuka Eiji describes how a series of collectible cards, each depicting individual characters and their backstory, each sold with chocolate candies, can evolve into a larger mythological system as small bits of information accrue over time. Otsuka, then, draws a parallel between this form of serialized consumption and the ways that details assemble within a television serial: "There are countless detailed 'settings' prepared yet not directly represented within this episode, including, in the case of *Gundam*, the era in which the main characters live, the place, the relations between countries, their history, their manners of living, the personal histories of the respective characters, the nature of their interpersonal relations, and even, in the case of the robots, the concordance between the functions matching their design and the science of the era. […] Each one of these individual settings will as a totality form a greater order, a united whole" (2010, 107). Just as the child collects cards or stickers as tokens of a fictional world, the fan watching a television series forms mental links between a range of details which constitute a fictional world.

If Andrews turns to Goodman, Mark J. P. Wolf's *Building Imaginary Worlds* (2013) starts with J. R. R. Tolkien and his conception of "sub-creation." In this account, worlds are invented by authors, often as a way of stepping outside and looking at the primary world of our lived experience from an alternative perspective. For Tolkien, this kind of imaginative world-building is seen as sub-creation, because it builds upon what he sees as the primary act of creation – the divine creation of the physical universe. Wolf proposes that we might evaluate the strengths of these imagined worlds based on three core criteria – inventiveness, completeness, and consistency: "Without enough invention, you will have something set in the Primary World [...] not a world unique, different and set apart from our own. Without an attempt at completeness, you have the beginnings of expansion beyond the narrative, but not enough to suggest an independent world; too many unanswered (and unanswerable) questions will remain which together destroy the illusion of one. And without consistency, all the disparate and conflicting pieces, ideas, and designs will contradict each other, and never successfully come together to collectively create the illusion of another world" (2013, 34). What may strike more casual viewers as insignificant details matter because they are part of a larger system: a well-constructed world operates according to multiple logics (including, say, historical, anthropological, ecological, political, economic, etc.) which often intersect each other in complex ways and which fans learn to read from the depicted details as openings for new speculation.

If Andrews's account focuses on the works of a single author, more recent accounts discuss worlds as structures that scaffold collaboration. Writing about the expansive worlds created for *Star Trek* (1966–1969) and *Battlestar Galactica* (2004–2009), Derek Johnson (2013, 109) explains "What emerges from the professionalized social networks sharing franchise worlds […] is meaningful, ongoing creative elaboration of shared production resources. […] By establishing a systematic set of principles to govern the look, sound and behaviour of narrative characters, events, and setting – and introducing increasing complexity over time – these science fiction series constructed their worlds as creative contexts that could support the emergent production and elaboration of further content." Here, the world acts both as a set of enabling conditions for various franchise extensions and as a set of constraints which determine what any given author cannot change without higher-up approval. Just as Johnson describes world-sharing in the professional sphere, Otsuka describes how understanding the underlying principles of worlds paves the way for grassroots forms of production, such as the Japanese Otaku community's wide-scale generation of amateur manga: "if, at the end of the accumulated consumption of small narratives, consumers get their hands on the grand narrative (i.e. the totality of the program), they will then be able to freely produce their own small narratives with their own hands." For Otaku, new contributions to this textual system are best understood not in terms of their originality but in terms of what each variant contributes to our understanding of the whole.

Traditional storytelling works through exposition: sharing backstory, while world-building works through description: accumulating meaningful details. These details are not plot devices; rather, the plot often exists as a means through which to explore different aspects of these worlds. These constructs work at multiple levels: as set of meaningful elements, as spatial and social systems that help us to understand those elements in relation to each other, as a larger logic which can be used by authors (professional and amateur) to expand the original story world in new directions. These worlds get deployed by authors (singular or multiple) in the process of generating stories and by readers in the process of "going beyond the information given."

The Particularity of Oz

> "[Oz is] a piece of modern American popular culture: a wide and constantly expanding realm of interlocking, transmedially active, mass-addressed commercial stories. With their narrative sprawl and their openness to ever new uses, these serial products complicate traditional narratological notions of beginning, middle, and end, source and adaptation, original and copy."
>
> Frank Kelleter (2012, 26).

The Wizard of Oz was the first of fourteen books L. Frank Baum wrote about Oz between 1900 and 1920. Baum did not initially imagine Oz as a franchise or even as a book series, since he invented many such lands for children, yet he felt trapped by its growing popularity alongside less than spectacular sales for his other works. He sought to escape Oz many times, but in the prefaces to the subsequent books, he depicted himself as being drug back by eager young readers who wanted to know more about Oz. Baum wrote in his introduction to *Dorothy and The Wizard in Oz* (1908, n.p.), "It's no use; no use at all. The children won't let me stop telling stories of the Land of Oz. I know lots of other stories, and I hope to tell them, some time or another; but just now my loving tyrants won't allow me. [...] This is OUR book – mine and the children. For they have flooded me with thousands of suggestions in regard to it, and I have honestly tried to incorporate as many of these suggestions as could be fitted into one story […] There were many requests from my little correspondents for 'more about the wizard.' It seems the jolly old fellow made hosts of friends in the first Oz book, in spite of the fact that he frankly acknowledged himself 'a humbug.' The children had heard how he mounted into the sky in a balloon and they were all waiting for him to come down again. So what could I do but tell 'what happened to the Wizard afterword?' You will find him in these pages, just the same humbug Wizard as before." Each book begins in a similar way, describing his latest story as filling in particular narrative gaps or mapping a particular corner of the fictional world.

Michael O. Riley has offered the richest account of how Baum's conception of Oz evolved: "Oz did not grow organically from a central idea. Rather, it developed in successive versions, each enlarging while superseding the one before and each reflecting Baum's current idea of what constituted the most magnificent and alluring fairyland in the world" (1997, 133). We can get some sense of this elaboration process by looking at the maps of Oz: a relatively simple rendering in early titles becomes even more detailed as the series continues. As Riley notes, Baum would increasingly locate his other story worlds on the borderlands around Oz, seeking to create a larger framework for his total creative output: "In the *Road to Oz*, Baum had drawn all his imaginary countries together into the same Other-world, but he had given no information about their geographical relationships. Now [in Tik-Tok *of Oz*] he actually shows the reader how they are connected. The fact that their positions on the map do not always agree with the textual descriptions is over-ridden by the centrality of Oz and the interconnectedness of Baum's entire Other-World" (Riley 1977, 186–187). Writing about the centrality of world-building to early 20th century popular fiction, Michael Saler notes the way authors tapped "the indexical idioms of scientific objectivity" in order to enable readers to play around with fantasy realms: "Maps in particular were important for establishing the imaginary world as a virtual space consistent in all its details" (2012, 186–187) [Figs. 2–3]. Saler describes the ways that H. Rider Haggard fabricated weathered maps, pottery shards, and other artifacts of imagined races, all to encourage the reader's belief in *She* and *King Solomon's Mines*. Baum described himself often as the "Royal Historian of Oz," suggesting his role in "documenting" and "recounting" a world rather than inventing one. In today's terminology, we might describe these "New Romances" as multimodal: they taped the affordances of multiple forms of representation. Our understanding of Oz was partially a consequence of Baum's own narrative prose and partially a reflection of the vivid illustrations contributed by William Wallace Denslow (for the first book) and John R. Neill for the subsequent titles. Those who only know the MGM film may think of the shift from sepia in the Kansas scenes to full

Technicolor in the Oz sequences as Hollywood's invention, but the books were already colour-coded, with Kansas described in monochromatic terms: "When Dorothy stood in the doorway and looked around, she could see nothing but the great gray prairie on every side […]. The sun had baked the plowed land into a gray mass, with little cracks running through it. Even the grass was not green, for the sun had burned the tops of the long blades until they were the same gray color to be seen everywhere. Once the house had been painted, but the sun blistered the paint, and the rains washed it away, and now the house was as dull and gray as everything else […]. The sun and the wind [...] had taken the sparkle from her [Aunt Em's] eyes and left them sober gray; they had taken the red from her cheeks and lips, and they were gray also" (Baum, 1900, Chapter One). Denslow's illustrations for this opening chapter were similarly monochromatic – a greyish tan colour. Each of the imagined lands had their own associated colour – Munchkins (blue), Gillikins (purple), Winkies (yellow), Quadlings (red), and residents of the Emerald City (green). But, beyond this, Denslow's illustrations helped to shape how subsequent generations imagined Oz; the illustrations were often more vivid than Baum's sometimes sparse descriptions.

Baum's Oz might also be seen as an important predecessor of transmedia storytelling. As Mark Evan Swartz (2000) documents, Baum personally wrote and oversaw a lavish Broadway musical based on the canonical story in 1902, adding many key details to the Oz world, including, for example, Dorothy's last name. The musical's cast also modeled performance practices – for example, the Scarecrow's rubber-legged dance moves – which informed the MGM movie. This first musical was followed by several more stage productions, with some subsequent books being more or less novelizations of plots Baum developed for other media. Baum ran his own motion picture production company to further expand upon his storyworld, introducing new peoples and lands that exploited the affordances of the trick film genre. At one point, there were competing Oz comic strips: one written by Baum, the other developed by Denslow, who was seeking to assert some legal rights over his contributions as an illustrator. Matthew Freeman (In Process) demonstrates how Baum used his comic strip pages as a bridge, connecting events depicted in the second Oz book, *The Marvelous Land of Oz* back to the characters and situations depicted in the original novel and foreshadowing Dorothy's return in subsequent books. Baum further extended his storyworld through the publication of *The Ozmapolitan*, a "faux newspaper" which featured an interview with the Scarecrow about his desire to be reunited with Dorothy, an event actually depicted in Baum's comic strip (Freeman, In

Process). Finally, Baum went on a lecture tour where he – as the author – acted as an interface between these various media. In this performance, *The Fairylogue and Radio Play*, Baum acted as a tour guide to his realm, with his lecture illustrated with scenes staged by live actors, 114 glass magic lantern slides, and 23 motion picture clips, each hand coloured, and produced by Chicago's Selig Polyscope studios.

Following his 1919 death, Baum's role as the architect, author, promoter, historian, and geographer of this wonderful land was passed along to a series of authorized successors. Denslow's replacement John R. Neill illustrated 36 Oz books and wrote three of his own between 1904 and 1942. Ruth Plumly Thompson added another 19 books, ending in 1939, and the official series only concluded in 1963. For a good part of the 20th century, there was an Oz book released each year during the Christmas season, a kind of beloved holiday ritual for many American families. Across that time, the Oz narrative was updated to reflect the tastes and concerns of each era, yet these various collaborators drew on a shared blueprint of the world (not always without contradictions) to create a series (not always without continuity errors) that could, in theory, though less and less, in practice, be read from beginning to end. And from there, we might add a range of other unauthorized contributors. As more of the Oz books revert into the public domain, there are at least four Oz themed television series currently in development for U.S. television. And beyond the realm of commercial production, there is a vast array of fan-generated material. *The Baum Bugle*, for example, has been published since 1957 as a vehicle through which fans and scholars alike might explore Oz.

On the one hand, Oz presents enormous difficulty in terms of cognitive mapping. It can be hard to hold all these details in our minds at once and so subsequent artists working across a range of media have tended to focus on some elements to the exclusion of others. On the other hand, popular memory of Oz has been reduced to a single book, a single film, a single plot, which needs to be respected if any subsequent work is to be accepted by a broader audience. This gradual narrowing of popular memory acts as a conservative force, making it less likely that future writers will draw from the subsequent books or extensions into other media. From the start, screen adaptations have depended on our prior knowledge of Oz, some of which gets evoked explicitly, some implicitly through the details mobilized in a particular text. We can see this process at play in the *Great and Powerful* ads discussed earlier. Most readers will recognize the Yellow Brick Road, the hot air balloon and the cyclone as referring to the core story, some may recognize the multiple variations of the Flying Monkeys as redesigns and expansions of a canonical race, while a relatively few may recognize that the Dainty China Country (found in the Quadling lands) was a subplot in the original novel.

I will now consider two different narrative strategies – one focused on restoring Oz to its lapsed glory, the other focused on providing a backstory – that have been deployed in recent Oz films; both approaches builds upon – and provides space for the further expansion of – the Oz world as it has been handed down to us from its earlier incarnations across diverse media.

Restoring Oz

> "Literature has time and again demonstrated its ability to promote a haunting sense of the presence of a spatial setting and a clear vision of its topography […]. These mental geographies become home to the reader, and they may for some of us steal the show from the narrative action"
>
> Marie-Laure Ryan (2001, 121).

In her analysis of world-building, Ryan explores how a deeper sense of spatial immersion may contribute to "emotional immersion." Ryan talks about the "madeleine effect," (2001, 121) referring to a moment in Marcel Proust's *In Remembrance of Things Past,* when the taste of a cookie dipped into tea brings back intense memories of the village where he grew up. A film which builds on a pre-existing world may have a similar emotional impact, a sense of nostalgic loss or homecoming. Our desire to return to an imaginary homeland may satisfy our desires to hear a familiar story retold, to return to a familiar place, and to re-engage the memories we associate with it. Given how formative our childhood experiences of Oz have been for many generations of Americans, Oz extensions tap both memories of pleasurable elements in the story world and of real life rituals around its consumption. My pleasure in Oz is connected with memories of anticipating the annual Thanksgiving broadcasts of the MGM film, a collective experience shared by many of my elementary school classmates, and by the ways we play-acted the characters in our backyards. The fictional characters are complexly overlaid with memories of childhood friends. For any new movie to evoke this nostalgic return, the films have to provide at least some of what made Oz feel like home: the world needs to be recognizable; the right details need to be chosen and rendered acceptably.

Let's consider how this sense of nostalgic return and the expansion of the story world co-exist in Disney's *Return to Oz* (1985). The film merged plots from Baum's subsequent Oz books, especially *The Marvelous Land of Oz* and *Ozma of Oz*, but altered them to allow for a stronger continuity with the canonical story.

Dorothy, for example, here displaces Tip, a Gillikin lad, who was *Marvelous Land*'s original protagonist, Dorothy would not return from Kansas until *Ozma*, the third book. As the film starts, Dorothy and her family are still experiencing after-shocks from the events of the first book/film. Uncle Henry has started to rebuild the family cottage, swept away by the cyclone, but the house remains half-constructed, as he has lacked the motivation to complete his task. Dorothy is struggling with uncertainty about the status of her Oz memories: no one else believes her story. And in what may be the darkest moment in any Disney movie, Aunt Em leaves her with a sinister psychologist, who wants to use electroshock to erase Oz from her memory.

As Dorothy escapes from the asylum in the middle of a thunderstorm, a flash flood sweeps her, and her pet chicken, Billina, back to Oz, but she discovers that Oz has lost much of its magic. Dorothy wanders down piles of scattered bricks, all that remains of the yellow brick road. The Emerald City is bleached of colour, its walls are covered with graffiti, the locks on the gates have rusted and the streets are ruled by gangs of Wheelers who harass her. Along the way, she also sees plaster figures we fear may be her former companions' bodily remains. This nightmarish landscape is all the more poignant because we recognize these places from other versions: we have a deep sense of what has been lost. What happens next satisfies our desire to see things set right again.

From this starting point, the film introduces new characters to assist Dorothy through her journey. Her companions – Tik-Tok, Jack Pumpkinhead, and the Gump – all come from Baum's books: the same is true of the story's villains – Mombi the Witch and The Nome King. However, the film must court the audience's acceptance by situating these new figures in relation to elements from the canonical story. And the film ends with a further expansion of the Oz universe – a grand parade celebrating Dorothy's success incorporates diverse characters, some fairly obscure, (including Father Christmas whom Baum transplanted to Oz from his other children's books). This sequence provides a sense of Oz's expansiveness, rewarding fan mastery while servicing the needs of more casual viewers whose knowledge need not extend beyond those familiar characters in the foreground.

Another key moment comes when Dorothy is locked into an old attic, where Dorothy stumbles onto a dust-covered portrait of the Scarecrow and company, a painful reminder of her loss, and where she and Pumpkinhead cobble together the Gump from old furniture and a taxidermied moose head. In the first instance, the attic functions as a space where we store old artifacts and associated memories. The portrait reminds us of a lack which must be filled by reuniting Dorothy with her missing friends, the ones with whom she shares her adventures in the canonical story. In the second incident, the attic suggests the ways that these materials can be remixed and re-conceived in order to generate new life. This is world-sharing in a nutshell, and I would argue, the scene provides readers with a way to reconciling the canonical story with a more expansive notion of "Ozness."

Becoming Oz

> "He [screenwriter Mitchell Kapner] [...] started talking about how he was reading L. Frank Baum's books to his children at night. And he said, 'Did you ever think about doing a story on how the Wizard became the Wizard?' I knew he was onto something with that question. Baum had created such a magnificent world with dozens and dozens of characters and fantastical set pieces."
>
> *Oz the Great and Powerful*, producer Joe Roth (Curtis 2013, 32–33).

The paradox is that a prequel comes both *after* (in the production history) and *before* (in the storyworld), though in the case of *Oz the Great and Powerful*, it also exists *alongside* a range of other Oz texts (in this case, *Wicked*, a text upon which this contemporary Oz film is very much indebted.) In this case, much of the film's plot is designed to move the pieces on the board towards the place where *The Wizard of Oz* begins. We can only appreciate the effort because we have been to this place before, while the characters are undergoing these experiences for the first time. So, to cite a few examples, this film shows us how the Scarecrow was made and recounts the incident that left the Cowardly Lion afraid of his own shadow. We see how the Wizard's hot air balloon got to Oz. We see the Wicked Witch of the West accept her wickedness and retreat from Oz towards the wilds of the Winkie country, and in the process, we intensify the conflict between Glinda the Good and the other witches. More importantly, we witness the Wizard's transition from a humbug sideshow magician – a man without roots or convictions – into the ruler of the Emerald City. In fact, the film shows us how he became the "man behind the curtain," including several sequences where the curtain is pulled aside to show him manipulating the controls of his various contraptions. Critics have described James Franco's performance as Oscar, the Wizard as flat and uninspired, overlooking the fact that Oscar is not intended to be the protagonist of his own narrative, that he is consistently shown to lack the qualities of a hero, and that films shows us how he comes to be able to pass himself off as bigger than he is. If we are going to get him to the place he must be for the canonical story, we must show how he gained power while lacking many of the qualities we associate with great leaders. And in that sense, the most significant actions in the film center around the process of conceiving, planning, and staging illusions, often involving the behind the scene labour of a group of Tinkerers (stand-ins for the Disney Imagineers). Oscar is not much of a man, not much of a wizard, but a very gifted illusionist.

Mark J. P. Wolf tells us, "backstories are often told in the compressed form associated with low narrative resolution, and the histories of different locations in a world are often told to the story's main characters as they travel from one place to the next" (2013, 202). In the case of *Great and Powerful*, these priorities are reversed – the entire film can be understood as primarily preoccupied with the pleasures of backstory and with the mapping of meaningful locations, and it was this shift in emphasis that confused viewers less familiar with the source material – they often experienced only a series of digressions and diversions. Some have characterized this quest for backstory as the kind of tragic flaw of our transmedia culture, with every detail needing to be traced back to its origins, yet it is hard to deny the fascination many fans have in backstory, whether it is used to explain character motivations or to add greater coherence and completeness to the storyworld. In many ways, what happened before the story is as compelling a question as what happens next.

Consider one compelling use of backstory. While in Kansas, Oscar is visited by a woman in a blue Gingham dress (Dorothy's iconic outfit in both the books and the MGM film), who may be the one great love of his life – Dorothy's (future) mother. We never meet Dorothy's mother in any of Baum's books. Here, she is given both a face and a name (Anna). They have been childhood playmates and sweethearts (perhaps lovers); he sees her "every few months" as the show rolls into town. Anna holds out hope that they might get married, but Oscar lacks the commitment to lay down roots, refusing to join the ranks of "men like my father who spent his whole life tilling the dirt only to die face down in it." This poignant scene offers fertile ground for speculation: how might it change our understanding of the events of the canonical story if we read the Wizard as Dorothy's biological father? Michelle Williams plays both Anna (in the Kansas scenes) and Glinda (in the Oz sequences), paving the way for a romantic entanglement between Glinda and Oscar, which might explain why Glinda, knowing what she does, nevertheless sends Dorothy to meet the Wizard in the canonical story.

For the most part, the dispersed bits of backstory revealed here are not terribly surprising: most often, these stories locate the Wizard as the catalyst, whose entry into Oz sets so many other things into motion. Just as Dorothy must restore Oz in *Return*, Oscar must arrive in order to prepare Oz for the events of the canonical story. Despite this lack of narrative drive, what makes this film immersive is that long-time Oz fans are able to explore this vast and wonderful world, seeing parts of it for the first time, through Oscar's eyes. And we can also see things and know things the character, himself, does not, a process best illustrated by one throw-away detail. As Oscar and his companions move on down the Yellow Brick Road, we can see rainbow coloured horses (the "horses of a different colour" from the MGM film) in a neighbouring pasture: the camera does not emphasize the horses and the characters do nothing to call attention to them, allowing them to function much like an "Easter egg" in a video game – a reward for observant and knowing fans. *Oz the Great and Powerful* adopts a journey structure, using the characters' movement through space to motivate its fascination with the world. The film's restlessness is already hinted at by the movie's opening – a long tracking shot through the heart of the carnival. From there, we see Oscar escape from the angry husband of one of his casual lovers, ascend in the hot air balloon, and get carried away via cyclone to the Land of Oz. From his hot air balloon, we see sweeping vistas of Oz's other-worldly landscape, as Oscar floats over the Impassable Desert and crash lands in the midst of a lush garden. Once landed, his travels take him down the yellow brick road, through the Emerald City, and through many other key spaces, include some familiar from the films (the haunted forest, the Munchkin lands) and some not (The Dainty China Country). Each space plays some narrative role but also rewards our desire to see, with our own eyes, in as much detail as possible, the landscapes Baum imagined.

Having built such a beautifully rendered world, mostly through digital effects, why waste it on a single narrative experience, when we can imagine the prospects of a digital version of Oz, where fans can explore at their own pace? While such a digital game world does not yet exist, we can satisfy some of these same urges by looking closely at the coffee table book, *The Art of Oz the Great and Powerful* (Curtis, 2013), which shows many spaces designed for the film, including some we never see on screen. Such books do not simply provide visual spectacle; the more we scrutinize these renderings, the more insights we may gain about the fictional world. Such books also share the thinking (and contributions) of diverse production contributors, including screenwriters, producers, directors, actors, production designers, costumers, make-up artists, special effects designers, and many others. Read closely, we can see how sharing core design principles allowed them to make independent decisions that contribute to the creation of an immersive storyworld.

Here, for example, the production designers discuss how they grounded their conceptions of these different locations in relation to alternative art movements (which they felt shed light on the characters' personalities). Robert Stromberg, the film's Production Designer, explains, "I decided early on that I wanted Emerald City to be very masculine with strong, hard lines. As a result, Art Deco became the driving inspiration. On the other hand, in Glinda's world, I wanted a much more feminine quality, more curves. So I chose Art Nouveau to inform the classic Disney castle motif we chose for her kingdom" (Quoted by Curtis 2013, 96). These two styles are already heavily coded within Oz's iconography: the MGM film's Emerald City relied on the then-contemporary Art Deco style to suggest its modernity while *Return to Oz* harkened back to the Art Nouveau style popular at the time Baum wrote the original novel. These design choices are grounded in the long history of attempts to illustrate, stage, and film Oz, themselves part of the intertextual process of world-sharing we have been discussing across this essay.

Through this world-sharing process, each new Oz text announces its arrival, making a bid as either remaining true to the spirit and detail of the original or as representing a different interpretation of the familiar realm. *Oz the Great and Powerful* must not simply produce a world; it must also reproduce it, and part of what allows us to accept this new version is the many different details linking it back to prior Oz texts. Of course, intellectual property constraints make this a particularly complex dance, since Disney is laying claim to what is found in the Baum books, but the rights to those visual elements we most associate with Oz (those in the MGM film) belong to another studio. Disney has to evoke the earlier film without duplicating it so closely that it constitutes plagiarism. Consider, for example, the film's end title, which is set against a blue sky and a rainbow (a homage, clearly, to "Somewhere Over the Rainbow"). Or consider another sequence where Oscar and his companion enter Munchkinland inside giant bubbles, a scene meant to evoke Billie Burke's memorable entrance as Glinda. The film's depiction of the Winkies and Munchkins still draw on the colour coding introduced in the Baum books, and build on iconography created by Denslow and Neill, yet they also depend on architectural details that evoke the MGM musical, as might be suggested by these two images showing the starting point for the Yellow Brick Road [Figs. 4–5].

We can note similar borrowings in *Return to Oz*, for example, the use of the Ruby Slippers – another MGM invention (Baum's Dorothy wore silver shoes instead) – or the design of Ozma's headdress, which comes directly from the original illustrations in Baum's books and from the costume designs for his stage productions and films [Figs. 6–7]. Yet, our current legal culture makes it hard to acknowledge such direct lines of influence, even when they are essential for maintaining audience credibility and emotional immersion.

Given this legal conundrum, the "making of" materials mask any connection to the MGM movie, which is not directly mentioned at all in the *Art* book, and which is acknowledged only briefly in the DVD's "Making of" video. There, *Great and Powerful* is depicted as the fulfilment of a life-long dream of Walt Disney to produce his own Oz movie. We are told that Disney had planned to create an animated Oz as a follow-up to *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves*'s (William Cottrell, David Hand, Wilfred Jackson, Larry Morey, Perce, Pearce, Ben Sharpsteen, 1937) box office success but was pre-empted by MGM's decision to produce its own version. The DVD extras share production designs and test footage for a live-action musical version Disney announced in the 1950s which would have used the young cast members from *The Mickey Mouse Club* (Sidney Miller, Charles F. Haas, Duck Darley, William Beaudine, Bill Justice, Jonathon Lucas, 1955–1959). The video authenticates the new film as the fulfilment of a key aspiration of the corporation's founder. And, as if to further authenticate *Great and Powerful* as a true Disney movie, the film provides us with scenes of the Wicked Witch pondering her appearance in a mirror and clasping a magic apple, both evoking iconography associated with Disney's *Snow White*. The *Art* book also cites *Snow White* as a key reference for the design of the Dark Forest (Curtis 2013, 89). We might also note that Stromberg's team fit Glinda's castle within a larger tradition of Disney castles from animated features and theme park attractions [Fig. 8].

Conclusion

What have we learned about worlds in our journey through the lands of Oz? Worlds are comprehensive systems that operate at multiple levels. Worlds include clusters of details that make a story feel as if it is operating within a real place, potentially supporting many other stories. Such worlds may exist across longer periods of time, beyond a single medium, and can be experienced from the perspectives of other characters. Such details also contribute to a larger system, a set of assumptions about the nature of the world, which might draw upon multiple disciplines of knowledge, might allow different fans to bring their expertise to bear, and might allow the work to be read again with new insight. A well designed world opens up – rather than closes off – the creative and interpretive process. Many such worlds have, from their origins, been collaborative – Oz emerges from the shared contributions of both authors and illustrators, absorbs new life as the series was continued by multiple subsequent writers, some authorized as part of the story canon, some offering radical reworkings, but all working from some shared understanding of what constitutes “Ozness.”

This shared conceptual model explains the continuity of details across different versions – the reduction of Oz’s “narrative sprawl” into a much smaller number of elements that constitute the canonical story, as the MGM musical has restricted which aspects of Baum’s original texts survive in popular memory. Yet, the most committed Oz fans can dedicate themselves to exploring its less traveled paths and uncharted corners. This shared conceptual model also allows for coordination and collaboration within large scale productions – whether Baum’s own Broadway spectacles or today’s blockbuster movies and AAA video games. More and more thought goes into the planning of these franchise worlds and their screen representations become more richly detailed to reflect contemporary trends towards “overdesign.”

In an era of immersive entertainment, audiences are demanding worlds that engulf us, worlds that sustain exploration, even if a small part of their potential is going to be realized within any given work. Yet, audiences also often hold onto the idea that they should be paying attention to the story and that excessive details may be seductive, pulling us off the path the protagonist is pursuing. We don’t know what to do with a film where the world-making may be more compelling than the narrative. Much as we have come to value the role of performance sequences across a range of popular genres, we may need to rethink the ways that worlds offer “other structures” which reward audience attention. We need to think more deeply about how the aesthetic criteria by which we evaluate worlds (their inventiveness, their completeness, and their coherence, according to Wolf) relate to the much more fully articulated criteria by which we evaluate stories.

Much of the current writing on world-building – especially Wolf – has stressed the act of “sub-creation.” Often, there is a tendency to dismiss worlds that are not sufficiently “original,” borrow too heavily on genre conventions or specific earlier works. Instead, this paper has emphasized the intertextual nature of worlds. In an essay dealing with fan fiction, Abigail Derecho (2006) introduces the concept of “archontic literature:” “A literature that is archontic is a literature composed of texts that are archival in nature and that are impelled by the same archontic principle: that tendency toward enlargement and accretion that all archives possess. Archontic texts are not delimited properties with definite borders that can be transgressed […]. An archontic text allows, or even invites, writers to enter it, select specific items they find useful, make new artifacts using those found objects, and deposit the newly made work back into the source text's archive" (Derecho 2006, 64–65). This approach values not invention per se, but generativity, the degree to which any given work helps to sustain the larger process of cultural production. We have considered a few of the strategies by which storytellers might justify their return to a familiar fictional world. On the one hand, as in *Return to Oz*, the story may seek to link the reader's nostalgic desire to revisit a world that feels like home with a story that returns the protagonist to that same space and through her, brings that world back to life. On the other hand, the text might start with an unanswered question – most often, in this model, as in *Oz the Great and Powerful*, a question of backstory – and then use that question to motivate a new narrative that fills gaps in our understanding. Baum also often justified the extensions of the Oz storyworld in this same way – as responding to questions from his readers. Accompanying such extensions, there is a desire to "authenticate" the new text as legitimately fitting within the shared world and so, there is a performative aspect of world-sharing, where certain shared elements that seem essential to the reader's experience are deployed to pave the way for further expansion and exploration. As a story world moves across media, as it gets renewed for a new generation, it has to respond to audience expectations about what this world looks like and what kinds of things we expect to see there.

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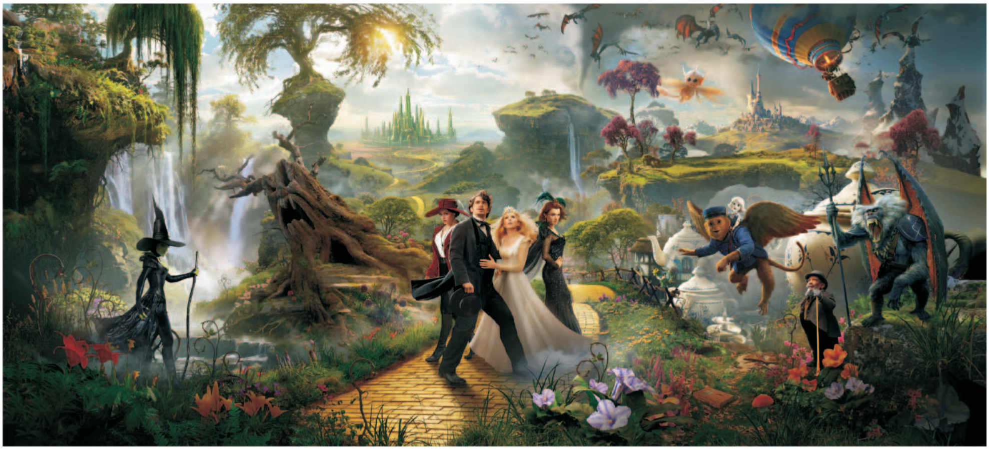
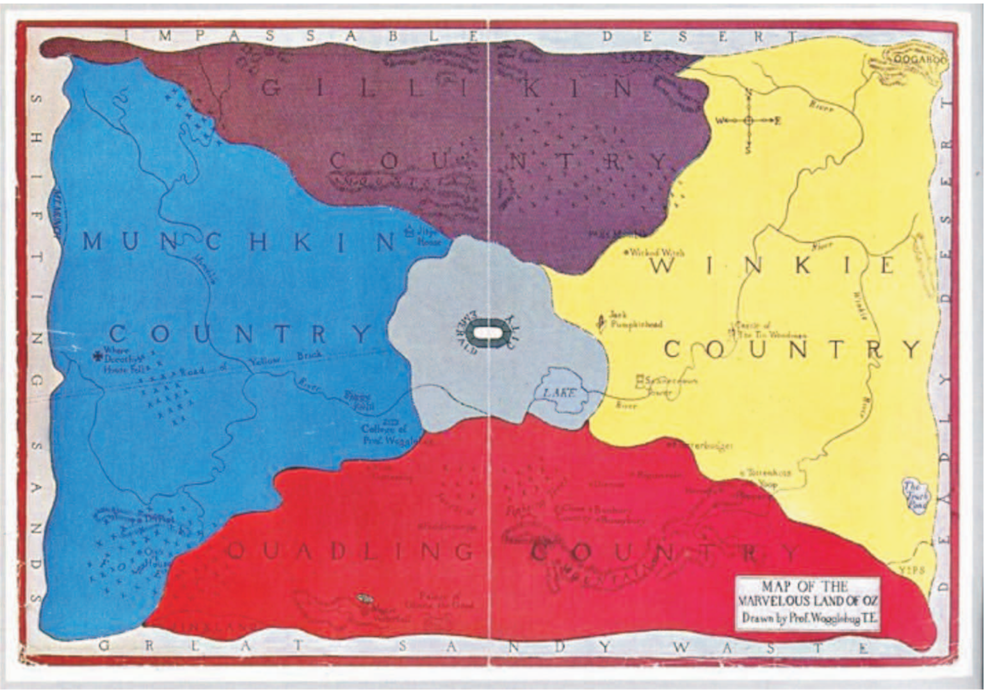
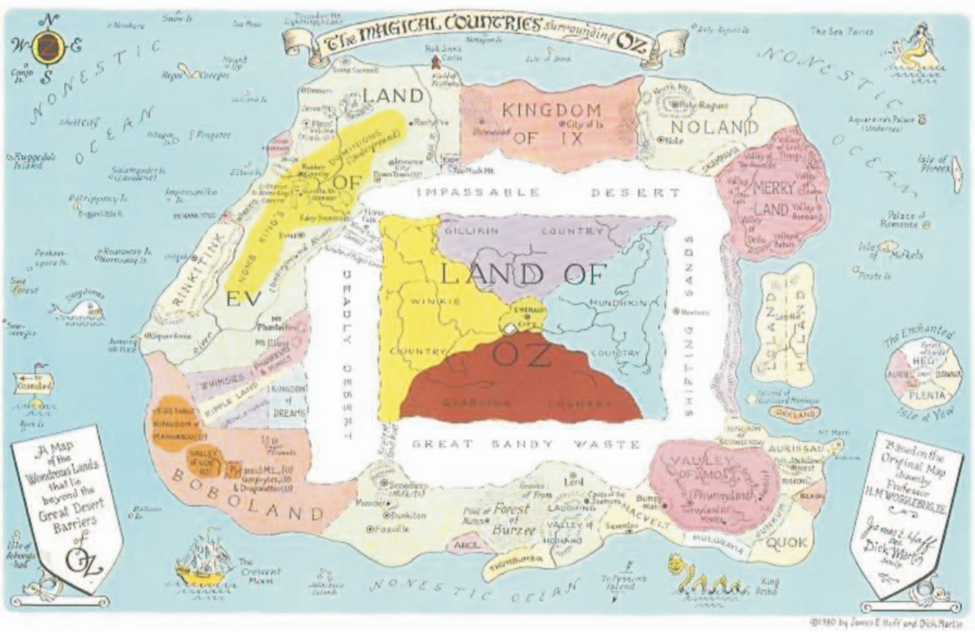
List of Figures

Figure 1. Advertisement for *Oz the Great and Powerful* (2013).



Figures 2–3. Maps of the world of Oz from *The Wizard of Oz* and *Tik-Tok of Oz.*


IMPASSABLE DESERT
GILLIKIN COUNTRY
MUNCHKIN COUNTRY
WINKIE COUNTRY
QUADLING COUNTRY
EMERALD CITY
LAKE
SHIFTING SANDS
DEADLY DESERT
GREAT SANDY WASTE
OOGABOO
W
E
River
Jinjer House
Wicked Witch
Jack Pumpkinhead
Castle of The Tin Woodman
Where Dorothy's House Fell
Road of Yellow Brick
River
College of Prof. Wogglebug
Winkie River
The Truth Pond
YIPS
MAP OF THE
MARVELOUS LAND OF OZ
Drawn by Prof. Wogglebug T.E.


The MAGICAL COUNTRIES surrounding OZ
N
W
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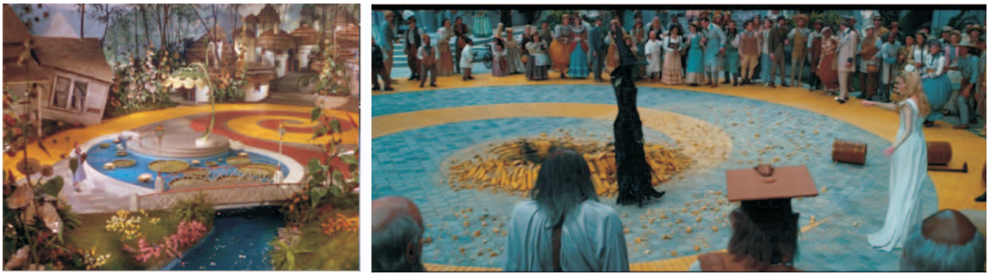
NONESTIC OCEAN
LAND OF EV
KINGDOM OF IX
NOLAND
MERRY LAND
IMPASSABLE DESERT
GILLIKIN COUNTRY
LAND OF OZ
WINKIE COUNTRY
MUNCHKIN COUNTRY
QUADLING COUNTRY
EMERALD CITY
DEADLY DESERT
SHIFTING SANDS
GREAT SANDY WASTE
RINKITINK
BOBOLAND
DOMINIONS OF THE NOME KING
KINGDOM of DREAMS
VALLEY OF MO
QUOK
ILLAND
OOGLAND
Forest of Burzee
The Enchanted Isle of Yew
A Map of the Wondrous Lands that lie beyond the Great Desert Barriers of Oz
Based on the Original Map drawn by Professor H.M. Wogglebug, T.E.
James E. Haff and Dick Martin
©1980 by James E. Haff and Dick Martin

Figures 4–5. The Yellow Brick Road in *The Wizard of Oz* and *Oz the Great and Powerful*.



Figures 6–7. Ozma’s headdress: *Return to Oz* and *The Patchwork Girl of Oz*.

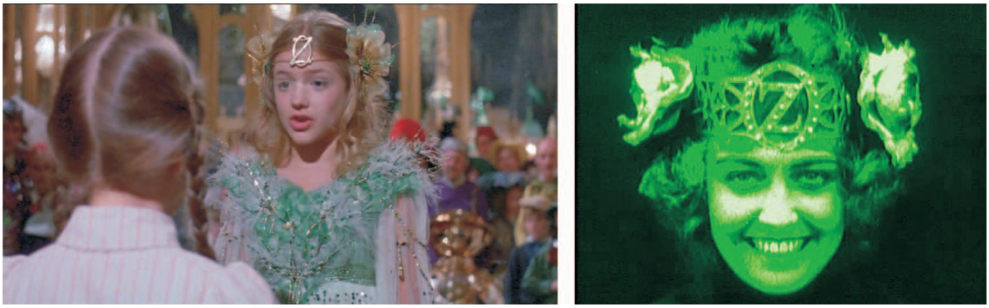
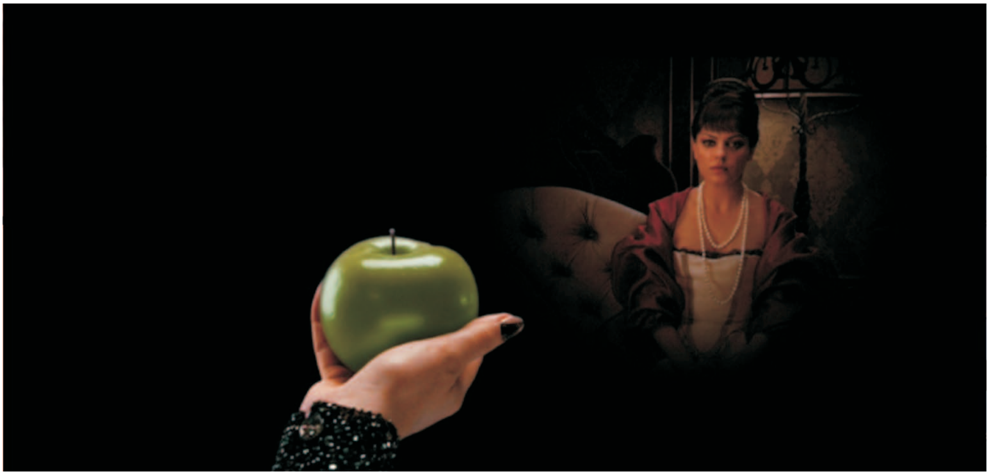


Figure 8. *Snow White* used as a key reference.



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Intermediate Images

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Keynote talk given at the conference of ISIS (International Society for Intermedial Studies) "*Rethinking Intermediality in the Digital Age*" organized by the Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania, in Cluj-Napoca, Romania, between the 24th and 26th of October 2013. (The photos of Joachim Paech illustrating the article were taken by Ágnes Pethő.)

Abstract. Starting from a definition of the word 'picture' as a real-world object that shows other objects on its surface as a representation of its image, I propose that the intermediality of pictures of all kinds is only possible through their images, after they have been separated from their material basis or foundation (for example, a painting in its physical reality can never be directly connected with a movie). In all technical reproductions of images, such as printing processes, an image is taken from a negative matrix in order to realize multiple prints of the same representation. The most effective model of this procedure is photography: photographic images can easily be connected with their media forms to produce other, more complex forms, such as magazines, printed books, or films. Intermediate images in the form of matrices – sometimes transparent (e.g. in the light beam of a film projection), sometimes opaque – are required to transform one pictorial media form into another. Finally, for the digital matrix-image, there is no longer any difference between the matrix and the image: the matrix has become its own image, which can be linked to all other media forms.

Keywords: image, picture, matrix, technical reproductions of images, digital matrix image.

At the beginning of my talk, which will deal with various aspects of pictures, I would have preferred introducing a picture that I personally like very much. Its title is *Scanty Words of the Thrifty Man* (*Karge Worte des Sparsamen*), painted by Paul Klee in 1924, oil and watercolour on paper, 45 cm by 29.5 cm [Fig. 1]. Unfortunately, the Berggruen Collection at the Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin, where the picture currently resides, refused to make the painting available for our colloquium, and therefore it must remain in its place on the museum wall. Nevertheless, although it is not the original, I can show you photographic reproductions that depict this painting by Paul Klee, but which of course cannot be the picture itself. In the following, I will refer to such reproductions as 'images' (that is, images of the original picture). Printed on paper, the poster and the postcard offered at the museum shop are colour prints featuring rather different colour tones and formats [Fig. 2]. The great number of copies of these prints is significant; in contrast, the original picture hanging in its place on the museum wall in Berlin is the only irreproducible specimen. What recurs in the prints is not the picture, but rather the image, the representative surface that obviously can be detached from the picture and reproduced in many ways with different media properties. The images on the posters and postcards, as I've already noted, are not the picture that they depict (even though we frequently make this substitution for the sake of convenience), but they signify it, in that their images refer back to the picture. They have the shape and the figure of the picture, such that they formulate the picture that they signify or represent. These images are apparently capable of multiplying themselves with different media properties. In this sense, the extreme case is the digital form of an image, which can employ any format, colour nuance, and media connection in processes of intermediality as on this page in its digitally represented combination of an image and a text.

The following considerations will address the intermediality of images. My thesis is that there cannot be an intermediality of pictures (because of their singularity and their particular media properties); however, an intermediality of images is possible. For the intermediality of images, certain requirements of the technique play a significant role; this refers to the creation of inauthenticities (*uneigentliche*) or quasi-pictures, which in the following analysis I will call matrices. These matrices are fundamental elements in the operation of the technical imaging process, functioning as intermediate images (*Zwischen-Bilder*) for both the production of images as well as their integration into other media processes.

1. Pictures

For several reasons, this discussion about images and their intermediality presupposes an answer to the oft-repeated question, “What is a picture?” (cf. Mitchell 1990; Boehm 1994). For one thing, images are also pictures, even if they are other pictures. Second, the historical appearance (or debut) of images as the result of technical reproductive processes occurred as a specific separation (or differentiation in terms of media) within the history of pictures. And third, in our media-amnesia, we have become accustomed to calling everything that deals with representations of visuality in the broadest sense of the term ‘a picture,’ but which will refer to different regimes of the term. Only against the background of media differentiation does it become clear that paintings and sculptures on the one hand and metaphors, symbols, imagined or remembered pictures, or mental images on the other cannot be subsumed under the same concept of picture. Especially in their intermedia use, the media properties of pictures play the determining role in their media sphere; for this reason, the metaphoric meaning of the term picture is excluded from this discussion.

I would like to suggest the following basic definition for the word picture. The term refers to a real-world object that represents other real or unreal objects, especially in their absence, without being them (although specific restrictions might apply to abstract paintings[1]). A picture is always just a picture, no matter what it shows. The uses of pictures beyond this definition (for example, metaphoric, magical, or mystical uses) have no relation to their intrinsic properties, being the results of different attributions. Pictures as physical objects and representations are characterized by their two-sided form, whereby one side, the form, is determined by the other, the medium. Each side is echoed on the other: the medium in the figural process of its representation, and the form in the observation of the medium as a picture. The media (material) properties of the canvas and paints used in a painting or the marble of a sculpture determine the respectively represented forms; the canvas and marble are observable as forms of their materiality and become media of (aesthetic) representation only in their use as picture or sculpture. This observation of a picture as a “two-sided form” is the prerequisite for the idea that the inseparable unity that is this picture can under certain circumstances divide into two forms, one of which (the figurative representation) can be formulated anew under other media conditions. The picture stays behind (e.g. on the wall in the museum), while its image, with other media properties, can be (nearly) endlessly multiplied and connected to other media forms.

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[1] If, as Clement Greenberg asserts, the proper subject matter of each individual art form is precisely that which is based solely on the nature of its particular medium, then for art that is its own subject, any intermedial extension is precluded. Pictures, too, are only that which they represent – namely, pictures. (Cf. Greenberg: *Modernistische Malerei* (255–264) and *Intermedia* (446–455), in *Die Essenz der Moderne*, 1997.)

Every picture as an object of reality and – as a rule – a product of craftsmanship and artistic production is unique. Pictures are unique occurrences or occurrences of their uniqueness. The artist's signature marks the uniqueness of a visual work of art by reference to its author. A specific picture has a specific place, even though it can be moved (or transported) between sites. Catalogues classify pictures according to their locations in galleries or museums. Pictures themselves are not reproducible. The copies of a picture are new pictures, whose reference is their model; they are forgeries if they seek to take the place of their model. Copying and forgery do not nullify the uniqueness of the models, as long as the new works are recognizable as copies; otherwise, they become another original picture.

Pictures as unique objects in our physical reality that exhibit specific media (material) properties cannot be connected in processes of intermediality with other media forms. In other words, the representation of a painting (e.g. in a book or a film) by the painting itself is not possible.

2. Images

The intermedia reproduction of a picture in another media connection presupposes the fact that the picture is generally reproducible and exhibits media properties that allow it to connect with other media surroundings. Images are media forms generated by pictures that can be removed from their source medium and connected to other media in which they are limitlessly reproducible. An image refers to its media origin (i.e., the original medium) as a picture by repeating its image and conveying traces of its media properties in its form. Images thus 'formulate' the picture by using its image in other media contexts.

Along with their ability to be endlessly duplicated, the process by which images are separated from their pictorial origins or models and become independent artistic entities is at the core of the history of the technical production of pictures (actually the production of images, to use this discussion's definitions). Initially, this production was not focused on the repetition of (artisanal or artistic) pictures by means of their reproduction. Early technical representations are basically prints from matrices with various media properties, such as stone, metal, wood, or (for photographs) glass and celluloid. Often, the plate of the matrix was produced as a work of art by a master craftsman; however, the matrix was not the intended final picture, but rather the images or prints that were produced using a simple technical or mechanical process. When the printing process was finished and the desired or technically possible quantity of prints had been produced, the matrix could be destroyed (for example, if the edition of the prints was intended to be limited). In some cases, the limitation of this duplication has given the prints some properties of the original, but one never obtains original pictures from an image. Even valuable wood or copperplate engravings (e.g. from Dürer's time) are multiple images of their matrix in the printing process. A similar situation applies to photographs; even in the case of a restricted edition of prints by the artist, these prints have their origin in a matrix and in its ability to endlessly reproduce the same image.

The technical printing method shows how the image frees itself from its matrix, which as a negative form can transfer its media properties through printing onto another medium (paper) that reproduces the media form of the matrix (but not its medium). The medium can be destroyed, but its form has been transferred by means of the printing process and thus it continues as a form in another medium (paper) [Figs. 3–5].

The intermediality of images is made possible by the process of transformation that occurs between the matrix and the image, whereby the represented form is transferred between a negative source (the matrix) and a (reproducible) positive image. This new trans-form is capable of connection to various other media forms.[2] The technical reproduction of original paintings (or sculptures) assumes that first a matrix can be produced; then, using this matrix, the picture can be reproduced in the new media form of its image. This is the historical achievement of the photograph, which has utilized its matrix to transform the world's objects (including physical pictures) into a world of image streams.

Walter Benjamin has described this process of transformation with two concepts that can clarify the process from different sides. First, in our cultural history, technical reproduction and duplication has always been connected with the production of a work of art with the help of a matrix – with casting moulds, punches, or blocks – while unique works of art have generally been irreproducible. In Benjamin's ontological understanding of photography, the photograph, the output of the most advanced reproductive technology, directly repeats the object of reference in its image; it thus corresponds to the "the urge […] to get hold of an object in very close proximity by way of its picture, or better its image, its reproduction [Benjamin's distinction]. Unmistakably, reproductions such as those offered by picture magazines and newsreels differ from pictures" (Benjamin 1963, 18–19). Common to all reproductive technologies is the fact that they allow multiple images of their models, as alike as fingerprints; however, these images lack the authenticity of the unique picture, which is why Benjamin insists that they are merely images.

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[2] According to Luhmann connectivity refers to the "feasibility of other possibilities." Symbolic characters (e.g. letters) feature high connectivity; iconic characters (e.g. pictures) have lower connectivity (cf. Luhmann 1987).

The second concept that Benjamin proposes to clarify the process behind the history of reproductions is translation. Benjamin describes translation as a form[3] that is already contained within the original and that serves its survival, in that it refers back to the original, over and over again. This idea of translation can be applied to literary works, which have been basically reproducible since Gutenberg, but it can also be related to other media forms – especially nowadays, when literary translations increasingly include transformations into other media forms, such as films, television series, etc. The translation as a form (cf. Paech 2010), i.e. the general translatability, is what controls or formulates the media transformation in the reproductive process. The photographic reproduction is also a translation, not of any presumed reality, but rather of the media form of the matrix, a negative form, which produces by means of light prints (positive) images of the matrix and the form of its translation.

Forms of a translation[4] are elements of all technical reproductive processes that operate in the transformation between the matrix and the images that it formulates. They are intermediate images or quasi-images that transport the forms of media properties as well as elements of their figuration, which they realize intermedially.

How are these intermediate or quasi-images that are defined by their function in intermedia processes observable? The matrices themselves disappear, or else these intermediate forms are media forms that are completely absorbed by their function in intermedia processes. Basically, these media are exclusively observable in the forms that they generate.[5] They themselves as media can be observed only in forms that become transparent through their function – that is, they are observable through their effects, while remaining invisible as media in the blind spot of their perception – or in opaque forms that obstruct and possibly nullify their media function. In this way, the medium of the images becomes an image of its medium.

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[3] "Translation is a form. In order to grasp it as such, we have to go back to the original. For in it lies translation's law, decreed as the original's translatability." (In original: "Übersetzung ist eine Form. Sie als solche zu erfassen, gilt es zurückzugehen auf das Original. Denn in ihm liegt deren Gesetz als in dessen Übersetzbarkeit beschlossen." Benjamin 1980, 50.)

[4] McLuhan speaks about "media as translators" (1968, 56–61), if something is "translated or carried across from one kind of material form into another" (1968, 58).

[5] Media generate forms, which in turn as media generate themselves as new forms,

3. Intermediate Images

In his media phenomenology, Emmanuel Alloa (2011) takes as a starting point Aristotle's question of how the object of perception becomes the perceived object in the act of seeing. It is impossible for the object in its physical concreteness to penetrate the eye and the perceiving consciousness; thus, in order for an object to be seen, there must be a mediation by something between object and eye that neither shares the material properties of the object nor belongs to the eye – nor is it, generally speaking, a thing. This "between," which Aristotle calls *metaxy* (Mahr 2003), is purely a medium of appearance, in that it enables the object in the act of perception to appear. It transfers the object as a form and in this manner informs the viewer's perception. "The *metaxy* must let the form pass; however, conversely, the form passes only by means of the *metaxy*. […] As a medium of appearance, this *metaxy* or *hymen* (after Thomas Aquinas) allows its own appearance to be eclipsed, as it were, becoming translucent" (Alloa 2011, 132). The medium of perception disappears with that which it brings to light as the perceived form. Its transparency (*Diaphanie*) turns into opacity when this medium itself appears as a form and becomes performatively descriptive.

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etc.; this means that media appear in the guise of forms, and that they can only be observed in the forms that they generate: as a mediatized form and as the form of their medium, a consequence of their basic reflexivity. Media are not objects, but rather conditions or possibilities of their formative processes and their observation. This enables the "realization that the distinction between medium and form is itself a form – a form with two sides, one side of which (the form) contains itself." This signifies "that the distinction circles back to itself; it recurs in itself on one of its sides" (Luhmann 1995, 169). The difficulties of this paradoxical construction of the relationship between medium and form can be mitigated by referring to the side in which the form is repeated as the 'figure' and the process of its formulation as 'figuration.' Media formative processes can thus become (aesthetically) concrete by the very figuration of their technique. Intermediality as a technique can therefore be described as a certain figure (figuration) of a media formative process, namely as the repetition or rewriting of a medium as a form in the form of (another) media, in which the process of intermediality 'figures,' thus becoming concrete and reflexive with respect to itself, as the technique indicates. Media are not observable as *objects*, and intermediality cannot be described as an *objectifiable fact*; rather, they are *processes* that leave observable traces.

With the development of the geometrical-mathematical construction of perception (i.e. in perspective modelling in Renaissance paintings), the form through which perception is transmitted was attributed a particular significance for the representation of seeing. The originally diaphanous (transparent) medium of transmission, the *metaxy* between object and eye (or consciousness), now becomes the visible form of the formulation of visibility, more or less displacing the mediated object. The medium thus changes from one of transparency (*Diaphanie*) to one of opacity.

In Dürer's *Unterweysung der Messung* (*Instruction in Measurement*, 1538) [Fig. 6], a transparent cloth or *velum* (cf. Endres–Wittmann–Wolf 2005) is stretched between the (motionless!) object of the perception and the perceiving eye. Visual lines connect every point of the object to the eye of the observer or artist. The positions at which they cut through this *velum* (or are cut by the *velum*) are conscientiously marked until an image of the object as it appears to the eye is generated on the cloth. No longer invisible (diaphanous) but instead an increasingly opaque medium of perception, it should enable the perception of the object to appear as the image of its perception, which can serve as a matrix for additional images. From the outset, it has its own (media) form, a network structure or grid (cf. Krauss 1981; Dyett 2013) into which another perceived form of the object is inscribed, until it or its own image is hidden by the object of the perception. From this matrix, it is possible to obtain further images, which can also be repeated in other media contexts. What comes into being here is an intermediate image whose origin reveals the transition from the transparent (diaphanous) medium of the appearance to the opacity of its own image. This interchange between transparency and imagery (representation) recurs throughout the history of technical reproductions and intermedia images, becoming increasingly more important.

How, then, does the photograph operate, this technically reproductive medium that was the first to putatively render superfluous the intervention of the human hand in the image production process (according to Benjamin)? The photograph was invented with the intention of accelerating traditional printing methods by means of the exposure of printing plates. Even today, photographs are referred to as prints. (Here, we are speaking of photographs in the modern sense, following the introduction of the negative vs. positive procedure of Fox Talbot's Calotype.) In the *camera obscura* of the camera, a photochemically treated glass surface is exposed to light through an objective lens. The negative thus produced can be used afterwards as a matrix for light prints on paper. Photographs are thus images taken from a matrix, from which an arbitrary number of photo prints or proofs can be made. With regard to this media constellation, it is difficult to speak of photographs in the ontological understanding as direct fingerprints or traces of reality.[6] A photograph is the image of its matrix; it is that which appears between a (photographic) matrix (on glass, film, etc.) and its imprint, which in this form can be endlessly repeated. This operative space is open to interventions and manipulations in the image process.

From the outset, the common usability or ubiquitous accessibility of the new technical images enabled by photography was one of the technique's most outstanding characteristic features. In different dimensions, on different backings, etc., these photographic images could be inserted in complete editions of books, for example. In this cumulative sense, photographs were not yet an intermedia part of books (or the literature); up to the end of the nineteenth century, woodcuts (often based on a photograph) were still preferred to photographs because they could be integrated into a text and be printed together with it. Ultimately, the development of the raster process enabled the direct connection of photographs with the surrounding text, using a point structure shared by both (a technique used at first for illustrated magazines). An exemplary intermedia procedure! In this process, the photograph is dissolved into a network of points whose size or density dictates the sharpness or resolution of the representation, and whose variations in brightness (greyscale values) results in the shading of surfaces and contours. Whereas the irregular granularity of the photochemical surface is a media property of the photographic image, the additional raster enables the picture to be connected to the point construction of the printed text. The raster is a form of translation – here, the translation of a text structure into a picture structure for the direct connection of the two; it is the use of a *velum* in the opposite direction, now not for the purpose of constructing an image, but rather for the disintegration of the image into the surrounding text. This image printed in halftone can again serve as a matrix for the rotary press and the printing of text/image combinations.

To reiterate, it is impossible to connect a picture in its physical state with, for example, a book through an intermedia procedure. The separation of the image from its surface and the associated possibilities for different media representations and resolutions are what enable an image to be connected with other media surroundings. The raster matrix transforms an image into a text that can be printed and read together with the surrounding text: this picture has actually become a media component of another medium, namely the book (or the magazine, etc.).

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[6] The photograms of Man Ray are no exception, as they themselves represent the matrix with their primary impression of light, from which further images can be made in the form of photographs.

Aristotle assumed that between objects in reality and their perception there existed a certain *metaxy*, a necessary medium that could transport the appearance of a thing to the eye or the consciousness while itself remaining invisible, transparent, or diaphanous. Even without its own form, it formulates other forms, allowing them to be perceived. With the *velum*, this medium has taken a form: the network or grid structure of a cloth, the form of which is increasingly covered by what it formulates (the perceived object). Thereby, it becomes the matrix of its image, which could be removed from the context of its origin and replicated. For Aristotle, such an appearance always maintained the directness of its link with the perceived object by means of the transparent or diaphanous nature of its medium. The opacity of the *velum*, in contrast, has blocked the origin of the appearance with its image. The matrix has thus become a machine for "second-hand" appearances of real-world objects and a reality that becomes increasingly invisible behind the flow of images.

At this point, I would like to refer to the distinction that was introduced by Bolter and Grusin (1998) into the discussion of intermediality, which they call re-mediation. Re-mediation (like our intermediality) is defined as the repetition of a medium as a form in another medium, a form that demonstrates two tendencies. The first, immediacy, refers to the connection of media forms that maintains the transparency (diaphanous nature) of the medium of their connection; in the extreme case, this produces the illusion of a second nature, as can be seen in the representation of immersive rooms – i.e., images that seem to be penetrable, an effect that grew more popular with the advent of cinema. Hypermediacy in intermedia procedures means that the process of media formation itself is observable: an accumulation of various media forms leads to a clustering in close proximity or an overlapping of elements that interact, often without being transparent to each other. The immediacy of a Renaissance painting is based on its perspective construction, which guides the viewer's gaze into the depth of the represented space; when the grid of the geometrical construction of the space is superimposed, the result is hypermediacy. The addition of the intermediate image of the matrix disturbs the painting's illusionary depth of space; the image's visibility underneath the grid of lines is threatened, and a new hypermedia aesthetics of geometrical iconicity is generated [Fig. 7].

The complexity of the play between transparency (*diaphanie*) and opacity in the appearance of the image becomes evident with the modern translucent pictures provided by photographs, slides (cf. Dilly 1975 and 1996; Wenk 1999; Nelson 2000), and film images. In these cases, the matrix in the form of a slide or diapositive transmits (via its projection onto a screen) its image as a light print, enabling its appearance at a new location. The light assumes the form (or information) of the matrix, removing the image and invisibly transporting its form to the screen, where it (as an immaterial image) becomes visible or appears. The matrix is left behind (in the projector) and can be forgotten (often hidden behind a wall); the significant event is the appearance of the image. Between the screened matrix of the slide and the projected image, a space of transformation is bridged in which the transparent (diaphanous) intermediate image is transported as pure light-based information or form to the screen upon which it appears.[7] In fact, the image can be made visible at any point along the projection beam[8] if the transparency (*diaphanie*) of the intermediate image is disturbed by an opaque medium or interrupted by an opaque body. Clearly, the projected light contains the intermediate image as a transparent (diaphanous) form until it is made visible by the intervention of an opaque medium.

A film projection is nothing more than slides projected 24 times per second. The matrix of the filmstrip projects a series of frames that appear on the projection screen as a single moving picture. Their figurative difference within a coded margin allows the illusion of movement in the cinematic moving picture (without this difference, no movement becomes visible, despite the continued projection). The individual frames are projected on top of one another, as in a palimpsest;[9] their transparency allows them to blend into one another, and the differences between them are seen as movement [Fig. 8].

In the beam of light from the projector to the screen, they are mere forms, transparent (diaphanous) intermediate images, *metaxy* that are condensed only on the opaque screen (or any intervening body) into a single moving picture. The visible moving picture on the screen owes its existence to a disturbance (cf. Jäger 2004) in the transparency (*diaphanie*) of the intermediate images in the light beam after they have been detached from the matrix, at 24 times per second. This disturbance, which allows the intermediate images to become visible, can take place anywhere in the beam of light.

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[7] Even the electric light, as “pure information without any content that could detract from its capacities for transformation and information,” represents “a complete change” (McLuhan 1968, 62).

[8] Anthony McCall gives the projection beam itself a form in his installations *Line Describing a Cone* (1973) and *Five Minutes of Pure Sculpture* (Berlin, 2012).

[9] One can also refer to the moving image as a composite image of pictures with a certain family resemblance (e.g. different faces superimposed upon one another, the sequence of which appears as movement).

This becomes clear, for example, in Roberto Rossellini's short film *Chastity* (*Illibatezza,* 1963) where he uses this idea of interference in the film projection to emphasize the disturbance in the psychic projection of his hero. *Chastity* tells the story of an American who falls in love with a stewardess, whom he records with his film camera during a layover in Bangkok. Because she avoids him, he must be content to meet her in the form of these filmed pictures, which he projects in his hotel room. He positions himself in the projection beam, using himself as the screen and attempting to unite with the object of his desire – meanwhile making her image, which he embodies, appear on his body between the projector and the screen.

4. Digital Matrix Images

I turn once again back to Aristotle. To the ancient philosopher, for an object to be able to appear, it was essential that the substance of the object be realized as a mere possibility in light of its form or shape. The form of the thing is that which is real; its substance (materiality) is a mere possibility. It is a question of the lighting that allows forms to become detached from their objects and appear as they are. Even today, the entire analogue world of pictures and images is a world of appearances whose forms have left behind the things that they formulate. Their medium is the light (Blumenberg, 1957) that illuminates the objects and projects their forms. In my opinion, this ancient model of making the world appear has returned in the cinematographic process. A great deal has changed in media history during recent years, but "it is still the light – whether it comes [for Aristotle] from the sun, an electric lamp or a videoscreen – which is the origin of all pictures and representations which presents and explains the world to us. Without light, no picture" (Couchot 1987, 115). Between the material world and the human eye, light – itself without form – shows us objects by their forms, transmitting them to our consciousness. In the space between the film projector and the screen, it is light that transports the forms of the matrix and the virtual intermediate images, and then renders them visible on the screen. Without light, no film.

The French new media scholar Edmond Couchot claims that the evolution of the computer and digital data processing has allowed the development of a "new kind of picture that no longer owes anything to light, at least not in its production: these are the new synthetic or numerical pictures. […] In its creation, the synthetic picture is completely calculated by the computer" (1987, 116). This also applies to the light in such pictures, which as an algorithmically programmed effect forms an element of the figurative surface. Lighting here detaches no forms from objects in order to transmit their appearances; rather, it is itself a programmable form that can be distributed in a few points or extensively on the picture's surface. This picture does not require the constitutive differences that formerly separated the picture from the image and the image from its matrix. It was these differences in media forms that enabled the integration of other such forms through intermedia operations. The digital or synthetic picture no longer differentiates an image from its matrix, but it is itself a matrix image (Couchot 1987, 116). It is its matrix as a picture.

The representation of this matrix image is often hard to distinguish from photographs, although it gives itself away through the depiction of "impossible" points of view and unreal objects. The matrix image does not organize processes of intermediality in the way that films do (as a combination of photographic images, sounds, writing, visual, and narrative structures, etc.); rather, it is from the start a virtual intermedia construction of media forms that it melds with its own universal form of the computer medium. Because these synthetic pictures can presuppose no true referential reality and also claim no substantial reality for themselves, the performative data processing deals only with pure forms and their algorithmic relations in a defined pixel space. If analogue photographs become the basis for the digital representation of objects, for example, for the "picture-based modelling" (Flückiger 2008, 51) of a three-dimensional data space, then two different media forms must be reduced to a common denominator in the algorithmic calculation. Sounds and colours are media forms that are not formulated additively, as in analogue films, but instead as media forms that are algorithmically broken down and directly tied together with data from other media forms.

Because the matrix image no longer recognizes the constitutive difference between picture and image – or the object, its transformation, and the form of its appearance – there are no intermediate images in which the transformation operates either transparently (diaphanously) or opaquely to realize connections to other media forms. By means of digital compositing, point for point, pixel for pixel, other media forms are inserted into the actual matrix image as they are substituted (in coding procedures such as chroma keying) by these forms. Computer-generated representations themselves also use grid structures in a network for the arrangement of pixels in the picture space or in the development, for example, of polygon structures for the modelling of three-dimensional bodies. In every phase, such grids are components of the programmed picture process itself, rather than individual media forms added to supplement the (analogue) perspective construction that will disappear after contributing their spatial effect. A grid of polygons is no ‘velum’ that can be withdrawn so that the completed picture appears behind it. It is the picture itself [Figs. 12–13].

The intermediality of digital matrix pictures takes place as a combinatorics of coded data complexes that represent different media forms but nevertheless originate from the same media form of the computer. Many concepts left over from the analogue era have lost their meaning in digital procedures because these procedures are no longer defined based on media differences. If they are still addressed as normal pictures or images as usual it is also because digital pictures can appear to be analogue pictures without actually being them. Nevertheless, the appearance of their forms is a programmed pretence of the exclusive reality of the data stream that universally established them as nothing but visual effects (Flückiger 2008). Or, in the words of Morpheus in answer to Neo’s question: “What is the Matrix? Control. The Matrix is a computer-generated dream world built to keep us under control.” And: “The Matrix is everywhere. It is all around us, even now in this very room. You can see it when you look out your window, or when you turn on your television. You can feel it when you go to work, when you go to church, when you pay your taxes. It is the world that has been pulled over your eyes to blind you from the truth. […] Unfortunately, no one can be told what the Matrix is. You have to see it for yourself.” In the Wachowskis’[10] film, the machines control humanity, a world of people who experience a computer-generated false world as their augmented reality. Those who belong to it cannot make a distinction between truth and the make-believe of the programmed matrix. Their matrix has ceased to be a picture; it has become – only in the film of the same name? – the entirety of the perceived reality.

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[10] Andy and Larry/Lana Wachowski: *The Matrix* (1999).

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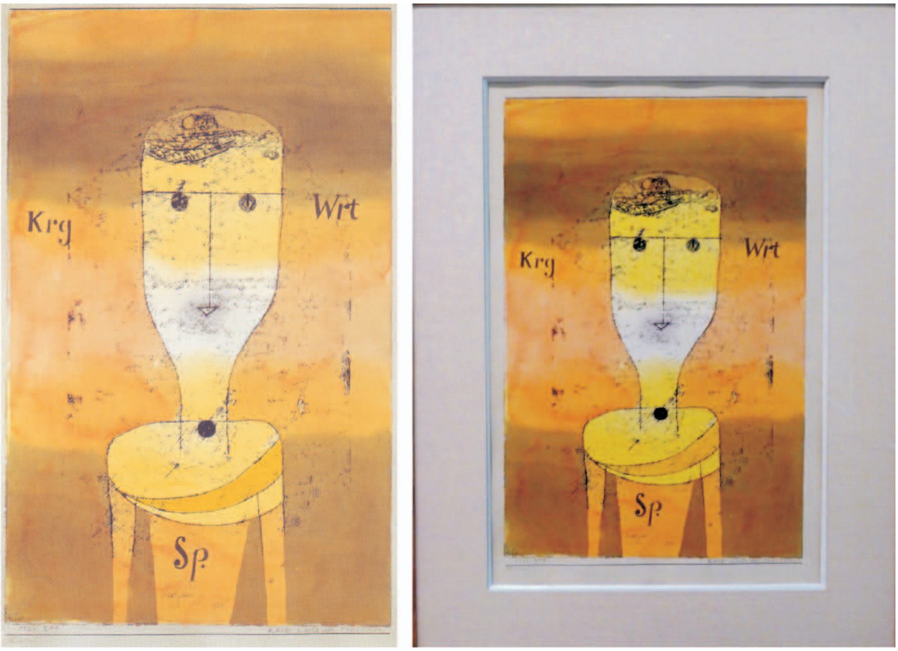


Figures 3–5. Example of the three phases of the zinc plate print.

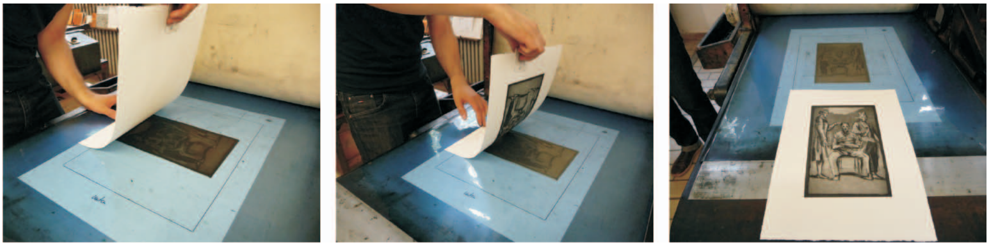
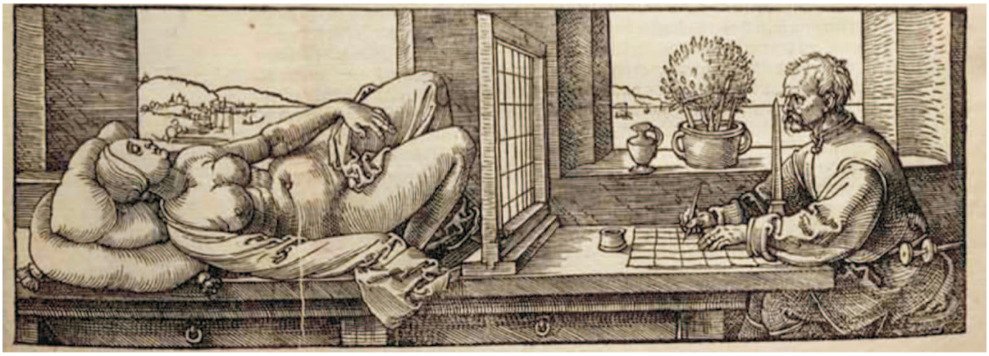


Figure 6. Albrecht Dürer: *Unterweysung der Messung* (*Instruction in Measurement*, 1538).



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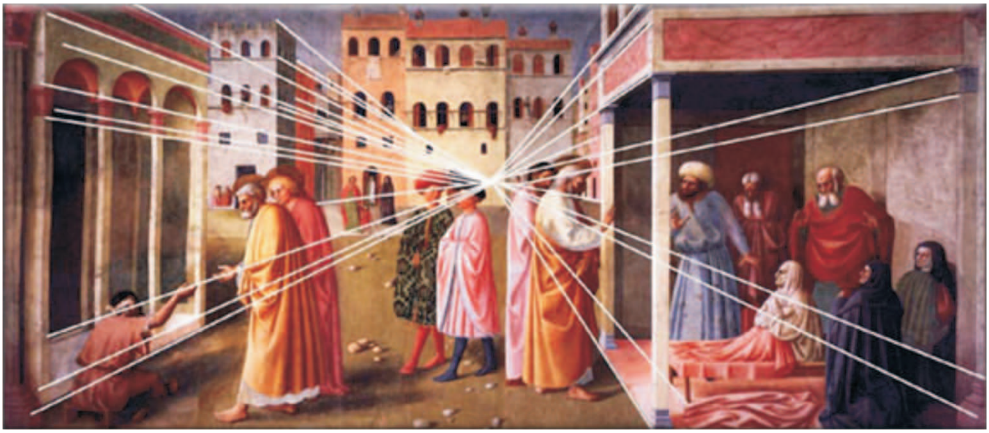
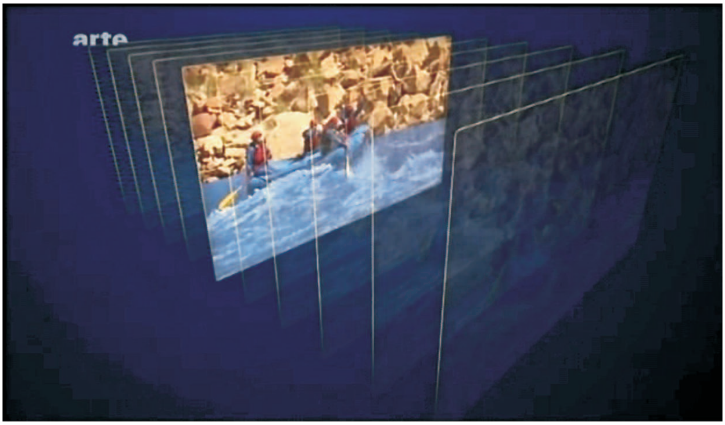


Figure 8. Film screening by the projection of single frames on top of each other.



Figures 9–11. Roberto Rossellini: *Chastity* from *ROGOPAG* (1963).

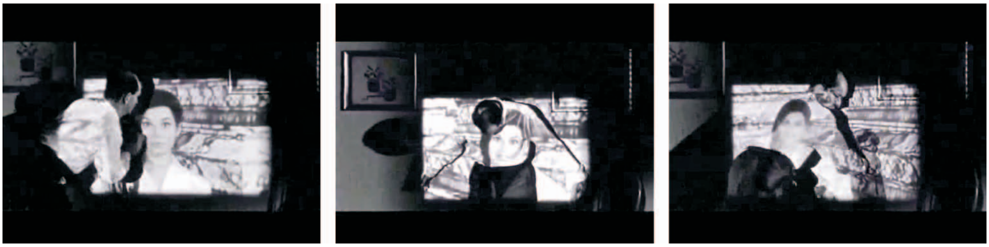
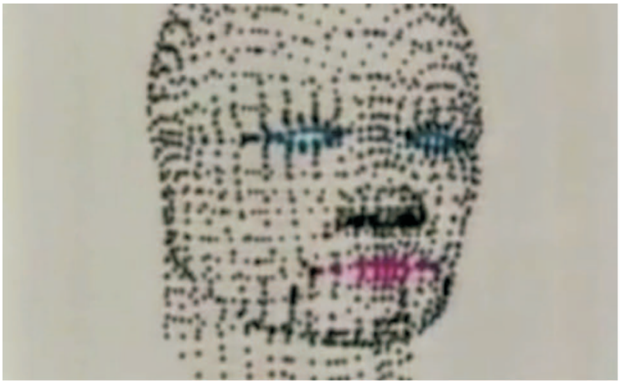
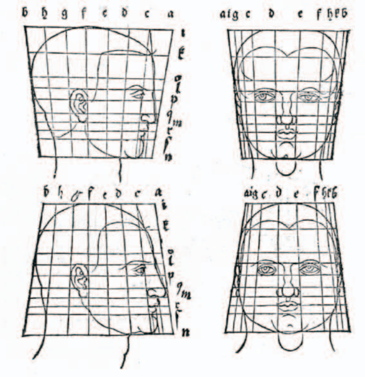


Figure 12. *Particle Dreams* (Karl Sims, 1988). **Figure 13.** Dürer's study of human proportions: faces under grids.





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The *Tableau Vivant* as a "Figure of Return" in Contemporary East European Cinema

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Abstract. The paper analyses the re-conceptualization of the intermedial trope of the *tableau vivant* in recent East European cinema through several examples from Hungarian and Russian films directed by György Pálfi, Kornél Mundruczó, Benedek Fliegauf, Béla Tarr, and Andrei Zvyagintsev. The *tableau vivant* in these films is not conceived primarily as an embodiment of a painting, the introduction of "the real into the image" (as Brigitte Peucker described), instead it appears more like the objectification of bodies as images, and something that we can associate with what Mario Perniola considers the "sex appeal of the inorganic" or "the Egyptian moment in art." As such, the *tableau* becomes a powerful agent in generating metanarratives, offering a blueprint for a "big picture," a comprehensive vision of the world (reinforced by recurring mythological themes like the genesis or the end of the world, the loss of Paradise, etc.). We may connect this feature of these *tableaux vivants*, therefore, to what Lyotard termed as the "figure of return," and to the reconstructive tendencies of contemporary post-postmodern art.[1]

Keywords: *tableau vivant*, embodied painting, East European cinema, the sex appeal of the inorganic, Lyotard's *acinéma*.

Embodied Paintings and Bodies Objectified as Paintings

Steering away from all the mainstream "new waves" that emerged in post-communist cinemas – and in some ways loosely connected to the tradition defined by the cinematic poetry of Andrei Tarkovsky, the ornamentalism of Sergei Paradjanov, and perhaps, the bizarre surrealism of Wojciech Has – we can distinguish several undercurrents in recent East European[2] cinema consisting of films that are somehow obsessed with the sensual and intellectual charge of the autonomous, painterly image (whether it is an image resembling a painting, or an image that seduces our senses appearing as a palpable texture instead of a detached screen). This is a tendency that is perhaps most palpable in the manifold revitalization of the trope of the *tableau vivant* and a post-cinematic aesthetics trading in the drive of the narrative for the compelling visual attraction of carefully crafted imagery. While the critical and theoretical reception of contemporary East European cinema repeatedly focuses as a default option on issues of time, space and identity reflecting on the complex changes brought along by the fall of communism, the disintegration of borders, the rise of new, precarious political constructions, the integration of post-communist states into the European Union, as well as by the growing tendencies of globalization, these "undercurrents" may challenge us to shift our points of view and observe in them an intense fixation on the language of moving images itself, a search for new forms of cinematic pictorialism. We may find, however, that this perspective over the films of these – otherwise very diverse – authors doesn't just redirect our attention towards matters of style and mediality or intermediality in general, but more specifically, it may also reveal different ways how these films manage to dissolve the cultural boundaries between East and West through connecting to particular, universally known references to Western art, as well as through their affinity with more widespread trends in arthouse cinema, while maintaining their distinctively local, historical reference frames, thus operating a new, complex system of "liminalities."

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[2] Eastern Europe as a geo-political and cultural term is used in this case in its widest possible meaning, including Russia and the Baltic states of North-Eastern Europe, as well as so called Central Europe and South-eastern Europe.

This shift of focus from narrative to visuals and the excessive emphasis on pictorial effects is a poetic strategy that is by no means specific to East European or even to current world cinema. Painterly compositions in a broad sense (descriptive, *tableau*-like shots achieved with minimum of movement), or re-creations of specific paintings in cinema (i.e. *tableaux vivants* in a narrower, theatrical sense) can be seen as intermedial figures that are present in different ways throughout the entire film history from the frontal, boxed-in *tableaux* of early cinema[3] (where they served as a condensation of the narrative), through their decorative, rhetorical/ideological use in Hollywood genre films and so called heritage films, to a means for self-reflexivity and deliberate subversion of the classical narrative in Jean-Luc Godard's or Peter Greenaway's works. In contemporary cinema the re-conceptualization of the cinematic *tableau* (both in its wider or narrower sense) often occurs in the context of what has been described as "picto-films," "contemplative/slow cinema" bordering on minimalist, experimental "stasis films," a type of cinema that may already be discussed as an individual paradigm, one that has arguably advanced from being associated with cinemas of the "periphery" (i.e. working outside canonical forms of Hollywood type storytelling and outside powerful centres of the film industry), to dominating a major slice of the repertoires of film festivals.[4] The examples from East European cinema discussed below can clearly be situated within such a broad context in which both the borders between East European and global art cinema, and the borders between the individual arts have become increasingly porous.

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[3] This type of shot is usually defined as: "the centred axial long shot, looking at an interior as if at a box set on stage from the centre of the theatre stalls" (see: Ben Brewster and Lea Jacobs, 1998, 38).

In her book, *The Material Image, Art and the Real in Film* Brigitte Peucker reminds us that in addition to fashionable parlour games in the 18th and 19th centuries, the *tableau vivant* also has its origins in pornographic staging of sexually enticing bodies, and considers that it is exactly "in its manifestation of embodied painting" (2007, 30), often "as or through the female body," and essentially through "the flesh of the human presence," (2007, 32) that the *tableau vivant* "figures the introduction of the real into the image – the living body into painting – thus attempting to collapse the distance between signifier and signified" (2007, 31). There is, however, the possibility of conceiving the *tableau vivant* as a reversal of this process, and in which embodiment is not erotic in nature (as we see, for example, in all of Greenaway's films) or, at least, not in its conventional sense, but can be related to what Mario Perniola described as "the sex appeal of the inorganic" (2004a) resulting in a fascination with the image itself: not with painting viewed in the form of "real," living, breathing bodies but with bodies objectified as paintings. Accordingly, the *tableau* does not attempt to merge representation with the real and to collapse the distance between signifier and signified, but emerges as a site for cultivating their distance in the opposition of sensual form and abstract meaning, moving image and static painting, live bodies in action and objects contemplated as a visual display, framing their intricate plays of in-betweenness. "It would seem that things and senses are no longer in conflict with one another but have struck an alliance thanks to which the most detached abstraction and the most unrestrained excitement are almost inseparable" – suggests Mario Perniola (2004a, 1) in a radical new perception of desire, one that brings together philosophy and body, inanimate and animate objects. And while this paper does not pursue an overall philosophical investigation, Perniola's concept may point to an area where East European films relying heavily on the technique of the *tableau vivant* (through different pathways and in their own distinctive manner) connect not only to global stylistic trends in cinema but also, in part, to what can be grasped in the allure of "becoming an image" within contemporary culture on a more abstract theoretical level, as well.

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[4] See the online debates over the status of so called "slow cinema." (E.g. Steven Shaviro: *http://www.shaviro.com/Blog/?p=891*, Mathew Flanagan, *http://www.16-9.dk/2008-11/side11_inenglish.htm*, Harry Tuttle: *http://unspokencinema.blogspot.ro/*. Last accessed 15. 07. 2014.)

I have found that in some of the films I analyzed, the *tableaux vivants* proper (i.e. images imitating a particular painting or sculpture) together with other, similar techniques in cinema (static, *tableau*-like shots, inserts of photographs, and photographic reproductions of paintings) not only reflect on the connections between the visual arts, but, perhaps even more importantly, enclose and cultivate almost irreconcilable extremes: from a sensation of corporeality in pictures coming alive as embodied paintings to the distanciating effect generated by conspicuous artificiality and stylization.

Cadaverous *Tableaux Vivants*

The quintessential image framing such antithetical extremes of "things" and "senses" (as perhaps the most puzzling instances in the rhetoric of pictoriality in East European cinema) can be identified in the type of *tableau vivant* that is, paradoxically, closely connected to the idea of death (the imminence of death, the sight of a disfigured, ailing body), in which a live body is displayed as a corpse, or the other way round, a corpse is presented as an embodied picture, or an object of art made of flesh. The striking still compositions that can be associated with paintings, painterly styles, pictorial photographs, or art installations incorporated by cinema have the rhetorical function of highlighting the grave undertones of a narrative which always leans towards the construction of a more or less overt allegory, either in the mood of tragicomedy and the grotesque, of gritty family drama, or that of a more abstract or lyrical meditation with biblical or philosophical connotations. In each case, in a very different way, the *tableau* form confers the filmic discourse a degree of constructedness and aestheticism that often emerges in a tense interplay with unsettling subject matters, or in certain cases, even a repulsive naturalism of scenes.

The most extreme example, casting perhaps the clearest mould for this paradigm, offering the most shockingly emblematic image for a typical East European mixture between artificiality and life embodied in a *tableau vivant* (and also a kind of literal presentation of the desire described by Perniola to become an object) can be found in the ending of György Pálfi's *Taxidermia* (2006).[5] The film is constructed in the form of a triptych of three satirical episodes, centred on the lives of three consecutive generations (or rather, as one critic called it, "degenerations"[6]) of men made representative of three distinct historical periods in Hungary: the first part takes us to the generation of the Second World War, the second part revisits the period of Soviet domination, and the story concludes in the present, in a Hungary stripped of any distinctive features, in the clinically sterile environment of an art gallery. Each of these parts can also be seen as a bizarre tale of survival. The survival of social humiliation in a hierarchic society and of the ordeals of war leads to an instinct of animalistic procreation and bizarre sexual proclivities, the survival in "the merriest barrack" of the Eastern Block under Soviet rule in what has come to be known as "goulash communism" takes the form of insane consumerism practiced as popular, national sport, and finally, a "survival" of the fall of communism is achieved through "reinventing" the same degenerate family as an exhibit in a macabre panopticon of stuffed bodies that can be presented as "art,"[7] moving the characters out of "the communist barrack" directly into an aestheticized freak show displayed for the entertainment of Western art consumers.[8] Accordingly, each of these constitutes a grotesque caricature of an era through focusing on different activities connected to the body and presented as a kind of performance: magical-realist sex (pushing a penis through a hole in the wall, ejaculating flames, siring a baby with a pig's tail), a twisted gargantuan gorging of food in a speed eating competition and, finally, hyperrealist taxidermy (after having stuffed to death the father's obese belly with food, the cadaverously thin last progeniture preserves the family "heritage," i.e. their own bodies, by mounting them for an installation/diorama). In the grandiose finale we are shown in a harrowingly long sequence of close-ups how the protagonist's body is being eviscerated, stuffed, stitched up and eventually transformed into an artwork (a "body sculpture" or "body installation"), and exhibited in a well-known pose for

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[5] "The beasts Palfi parades before us are merely caricatures in a pageant, and his abrasiveness hardly conduces to introspection – you're too busy turning away instead of turning inward. Alienation from our bodies, so potent a theme in Cronenberg, here becomes more an excuse for acts of virtuoso gross-out" (Elbert Ventura, *http://www.reverseshot.com/reviews/entry/383/reverse_shot_taxidermia.* Last accessed 15. 07. 2014).

[6] Peter Bradshaw in *The Guardian*, *http://www.theguardian.com/film/2007/jul/13/comedy.drama.* Last accessed 15. 07. 2014.

[7] In this respect the film becomes self-reflexive, as it does not only present a shocking art performance as part of its plot, but Pálfi's work itself can be viewed as a film that has been influenced by and that transgresses towards contemporary (performance) art.

[8] This episode is set in Vienna.

Western art in a trendy, contemporary art gallery (reminiscent at the same time of paintings depicting the martyrdom of St. Sebastian and of the Hellenistic torsos) in front of an audience also posing motionless as a *tableau vivant.* Steven Shaviro (2012a, 33) called the film "viscerally charged and icily allegorical," and as a whole Pálfi's film is an uncanny combination of social satire and concept art, with shocking, gut wrenching images of the flesh (an imagery that has its source in the meat-sculptures of the contemporary installation artist, Géza Szőllősi, who also served as an art director for the film). The fact that the film substitutes reflection on human history with bodily revulsion, intellectual analysis with disembowelment in the literal sense, manages, at the same time, both to reel in its spectators through creating these fantastically spectacular performance sequences, and to alienate them, as they may also have an irresistible urge to avert their eyes.[9]

Leaving aside the unique combination of the disgusting with the decorative in *Taxidermia*,[10] on a more abstract level, the *tableau vivant* displaying a corpse captures the potentially cadaverous nature of all *tableaux vivants*. As Aura Satz pointed out "the living picture lacks articulation (vocal, physical, and narrative), it has ossified into rigor mortis, and if and when it slackens, this is only so as to shift into the next pose, the next statue, or to snap out of it and back to normal fluid life. The *tableau vivant* is in fact a temporary cadaver, a presence which has petrified into object" (Satz 2009, 163). Moreover, we can add, quoting Caitlin Baucom's (2014) interpretation of Satz, that the *tableau* can be conceived as "a cadaver of a cadaver because it hardens into something already dead, referring always to a body image outside of its own."[11] The taxidermied corpses at the end of Pálfi's film perform this morbidification of dead bodies into other bodies becoming art exhibits, and are highly symptomatic of the almost inhuman detachment, if not always irony, with which some of these films construct their stylized images building on the opposition between "life" and "art," sensual and abstract, fossilizing their human figures into "dead" iconographical forms.

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[9] The critical reception of the film clearly indicates this divide: enthusiastic reviews alternate with evaluations that find in all of this more fireworks than substance.

[10] A feature that is actually shared by another work that was also made with the collaboration of Szőllősi, *Opium*: *Diary of a Madwoman*, a feature film by János Szász, made in 2007.

[11] See: *http://incidentmag.com/issue-1/critical-essays/performative-models/.* Last accessed 1. 09. 2014. We can also note here the long tradition in theorizing the image connected to the idea of death and the dead body: from Régis Debray's (1992) idea of the image as a "domesticated terror" (the prototype of which being the Egyptian mummification of the body, an opposition to the decomposition of the body in death through its recomposition as an image), to Barthes's or Bazin's views of photography as death mask.

We see this also in paraphrases of Andrea Mantegna's and Hans Holbein's dead Christ [Figs. 5–6] that have become a surprisingly recurring motif in contemporary East European and Russian cinema. The examples include the Hungarian Kornél Mundruczó's unconventional opera-film, *Johanna* (2005) set in the depressing location of a run-down East European hospital, in which a drug addict woman, having been brought back to life from the stage of clinical death, becomes a kind of modern-day, provincial Saint Joan who nurses hopeless patients back to health by offering them sex as an act of mercy, only to be killed and discarded from the medical facility like trash. The film contrasts the dismal artificial world of the hospital where people are strapped to beds and connected to machines with the supposed naturalness of the sexual act, the abject sight of the sickly bodies with the rendering of dialogues as opera arias or recitativoes, and with the stylized colour palette of the images enhanced by sequences presenting the listless, lying bodies as paraphrases of the Dead Christ [Figs. 7–8], while making Johanna resemble Vermeer's painting of *The Girl with the Pearl Earring* in a mixture of aestheticism, absurdity, and pathos that the viewer may find just as disturbing as Pálfi's combination of nauseating sarcasm and stunning visuals.

Mundruczó reprises the allegorical contrast between the unnatural and natural, cultural and instinctive in his next film, *Delta* (2008), in which the male protagonist (played by the renowned world music violinist and composer, Félix Lajkó, and as such, bringing a set of complex associations to the role[12]), returning home after a long time, engages in an incestuous affair with his sister (having a telling name, Fauna) with tragic consequences amid the "primitive" and harsh realities of the colony of fishermen, and in which again, we find a paraphrase of Mantegna's famous painting. This time, the elements of the painting and of the Biblical situation are reversed: it is not the Virgin Mary leaning over the body of Christ overcome by grief, but we see the frail body of the innocent young woman lying feverishly on a bed in the small cabin the siblings have built on the water, and after having been raped by her stepfather it is her Christ-like brother who takes care of her, who wraps her in a damp cloth (arranging her in the reclining position we've come to known from Mantegna's famous canvas), and sits by her side [Figs. 9–10]. The tone here is more elegiac than social critical; the beautiful shots of the Danube Delta paint a mythical backdrop, a kind of lethal Paradise, where the unravelling tragedy is subdued by the gorgeous cinematography. The image reminiscent of Mantegna's Christ is prepared slowly as the male protagonist carefully arranges the sheet around the woman's body, and the *tableau* emerges seamlessly from the flow of other picturesque compositions. There is no shock value in its appearance, the association is subtle, the image becomes like a fading palimpsest: the familiar pose and composition barely resurfacing within the cinematic *mise en scène*.

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[12] Félix Lajkó, a former child prodigy, has become known as a world music virtuoso with an intensive style of playing the violin or the zither and with an air of mysticism. His repertoire includes a mixture of almost anything from folk music to rock, classical music, or jazz improvisations.

A similar melancholic mood prevails in Béla Tarr's last film *The Turin Horse* (*A torinói ló*, 2011)[13] in which man is set against the raging elements, and which also unfolds an allegorical story: staging through a slow, minimalist narrative and a series of photographic *tableaux*, how – in a reversal of Genesis – the world comes to an end. Death acquires cosmic and philosophical proportions and is prefigured by presenting the protagonist both as the embodiment of Mantegna's and Holbein's dead Christ [Figs. 11–12]. These paraphrases not only constitute in their austere simplicity a sublime figuration of lamentation for the end of mankind but also underscore Tarr's extraordinary attention to how each frame is constructed. The elements are simple, the film is built using only a few building blocks (an old man, a daughter, a horse, a house, a tree), each scene is like a slowly moving photograph within a video installation, there is nothing left to chance.[14] And while there is a heightened sensation of photographic realism in the details (e.g. we see the fine grain of the wooden table, the rough texture of the plain clothes, etc.) everything is stylized and far from lifelike, instead of a story with characters revealing psychological depths there is only a sequence of repetitive actions, and bodies framed and reframed as images, and, ultimately, images fading away.

Benedek Fliegauf's *Dealer* (2004), presenting the last day in the life of an unnamed drug dealer, conceives the cinematic image in the same vein as Tarr. The mostly uneventful narrative is presented in a slow pace with static images of cold and eerie beauty,[15] and deals primarily with feelings of loss and emptiness. The dialogue is scarce, the protagonist moves in spaces that are either cluttered with junk or seem vacuous and sterile, accompanied by metallic, trance-like non-diegetic music. The film concludes with a long sequence in which the protagonist takes an overdose of drugs in a fitness salon and climbs into a tanning bed as if it were a coffin. As he lies down, his stretched out body, seen through the narrow opening of the machine, is reminiscent of Holbein’s elongated corpse of the dead Christ [Figs. 13–16], resulting in a powerful image crossing modern technology with classical iconography, an ironic view over the cult of the body[16] and a melancholic awareness of the hopeless isolation and transience of the body. The sequence is then prolonged and the image of the tanning bed moved further and further away from the viewer against a dark background, until it disappears like a spaceship within the infinite black universe or is reduced to a dot on the screen before its final blackout and the film itself shuts down like a machine. Death appears at the same time as mechanical (as a final disconnection from the world), grotesque (self-destruction in a fitness salon), and transcendental. The cold, artificial light cast over the body of the protagonist in this pose retroactively sheds a different light over the whole story, elevating it both from its realistic portrayal of contemporary urban ennui or desolation, and from a mere exercise of style, by capturing the moment of death as an enigmatic *tableau vivant* eliciting multiple associations among which the famously humanized depiction of the dead Christ is also one, but not exclusive, possibility.

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[13] The idea of the film comes from the story of Nietzsche's final breakdown as he supposedly witnesses the brutal whipping of a horse in Turin. The film constructs an epilogue to this anecdote which is used as a motto to the film.

[14] The behind-the-scenes documentary made during the shooting of the movie (*Tarr Bela. I Used To Be a Filmmaker*, directed by Jean-Marc Lamoure, 2013) presents how the whole setting of the film was constructed to the tiniest detail around the lonely tree at the hilltop.

[15] Fliegauf is also the author of a successful experimental film, titled *Milky Way* (2007) built entirely of individual *tableaux*, without conventional narrative, without dialogue, in which the sequences shown consecutively can be screened as an essay film, or, shown simultaneously, they can be exhibited in the form of a multichannel video installation in art galleries.

Perhaps the most complex use of the reproduction of Mantegna’s painting can be found in the Russian Andrei Zvyagintsev’s debut film, *The Return* (*Vozvrashcheniye*, 2003), where it becomes not only a clearly marked vantage point that doubles the reference frame of the otherwise realistic narrative, suggesting the possibility of an allegorical reading, but it also makes the viewer prepared for further, less obvious biblical motifs or cinematic quotations,[17] and initiates an intricate play between images and media.

The film is about two teenage boys whose father returns after a long and unexplained absence.[18] One day, coming home after playing with their friends, out of the blue, their mother tells them that their father is home and asleep; they go into the house and find him in the bedroom in the posture that we know from Mantegna's painting. The sons contemplate his appearance in awe standing in the doorway of the room where his foreshortened body is lying on the bed as a strange exhibit in a glass cage [Figs. 17–18]. As the boys don't remember him, they run off to compare the photo they have of him with the image appearing to them in the bedroom. The father, who has until now existed for the boys only as a figure in a photograph (tucked away in the attic in an album illustrating biblical scenes, placed in the category of symbolic images),[19] materializes in a form duplicating a painting, as a body, an image, an idea – also, perhaps, as an incarnation of the myth of the Father as the embodiment of virility and of Russia itself.[20] When he awakes, he appears to be distant, unsympathetic, eager to assert his paternal authority and enigmatic. He sits down to a final meal together with the two women (mother and grandmother, who have both been left outside the frame reproducing the painting earlier) and his children in a shot reminiscent of Leonardo da Vinci's *Last Supper* [Fig. 21]. Then he sets out on a mysterious voyage, a fishing trip together with his sons. [Figs. 22–24.] The story unfolds within a mythical time frame (beginning with Sunday, when the father-creator rests and ending with Friday, when the Christ-like father dies), along clearly symbolic axes: horizontally (undertaking a symbolic voyage of initiation, as the father takes the boys on a road trip) and vertically: the acts of ascent, descent, rise and fall. The film is framed by the image of a tower: at the beginning wee see the younger son being too afraid to dive into a lake from it, at the end, being angry with his father, the same boy climbs another tower threatening to jump down, and as he attempts to go after him, the father accidentally plunges to his death. At which point his sons are faced with the difficult task of acting as grownups dealing with the lifeless body of their father and driving home on their own.

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[16] This irony is underscored also by the posters displaying virile bodies hanging on the wall contrasting with the association with Holbein’s painting of the emaciated, dead body of Christ.

[17] The viewer familiar with Tarkovsky’s films may find several scenes paying homage to the master of “sculpting in time” alongside images reminding us of essential works of Antonioni or Kieslowski, as the film unfolds, through a consistently pictorialist cinematography, a series of impressive photographic *tableaux*.

[18] The film never reveals why the father has been away, the boys and the spectators can merely speculate: whether he has been in jail, has fought as a soldier in the Afghan war, or has just neglected his family for several years.

The title of the film, *The Return*, may be interpreted both literally, referring to the father who returns to see his two teenage sons, and symbolically, given that the film introduces the sleeping father as the replica of the dead Christ and presents events leading up to his actual death. The death of the father, in this way, can be seen as a return to this initial state (the parallelism is striking: the corpse of the man lying in the boat is shown from the same angle as we saw him lying on the bed imitating the Mantegna painting, [Figs. 18–19] and the boys are left with a similar, if even more horrified look on their faces as the boat suddenly begins to sink). So it is actually the loss of the father that returns. But while the body of the father disappears in the murky water of the lake, and the impression of Mantegna’s painting is washed away by the photogenic layer of the waves within the cinematic frame [Fig. 20], the power of the “image” itself is reinstated and reinforced.[21] What has been lost in painting is now regained in photography. The film ends with a series of photographs [Figs. 26–28], in which – except for the very last frame – the father is absent, yet we are now aware of his existence either “off space” (as we remember the scenes when the photos were taken) or behind the camera (in the old photos that we presume he took of his wife and infant sons). These final photographs used as a substitute for the diary of the boys, contrast the performativity of the instantaneous, personal snapshots (being singular, subjective, incidental), and imprints of bodies in motion with the constructedness, stasis and symbolical weight of pictorial iconography manifest in the explicit *tableau vivant* scene, as well as with the sensuous elements of the moving image in the carefully framed photographic shots [Figs. 22–24] or in the recurring landscape *tableaux* of the film. Thus the film rounds up different possibilities of people becoming images and images moving from one medium onto another: from the art historical “aura” and symbolism of the Mantegna painting, and the enigmatic cinematic embodiment as a *tableau vivant*, the image of the father is carried to other associations with drawings illustrating the Bible, to frames of pictorialist cinematography (which delight the eye but only enhance the enigmatic character of the father, whose aestheticized images do not compensate for the fact that his actions remain unexplained[22]), and finally to the intimacy of the family photographs. In this way, by foregrounding both the symbolic value of images and their performativity in our lives (how we are affected by them, how we interpret the world through them, how their signification may puzzle us, or how we may affirm ourselves through their various palpable forms), the allegory is as much about our indissoluble, intimate relationship to images, accordingly, about the relationship between image, body and differences in medium (painting, film, and photography), as it is about oedipal rites of passage standing in for contemporary traumas in a post-communist society.

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[19] The photo [Fig. 25] is kept in an album illustrating scenes from the Old Testament (resonating with the idea of fatherhood): as the boy leafs through the book we see the image of God as the creator of the Earth contemplating his work, a depiction of the story of Abraham's sacrifice (perhaps indicative of the boys' apprehensions about their father's intentions), etc.

[20] Accordingly, Zvyagintsev's film can be interpreted as a parable of post-Soviet Russia, which, having lost its great historical Father figures of undisputed authority has to cope both with their loss and with the "return" of such figures in different forms, only to repeatedly experience their inadequacy and unreliability.

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[21] I am using the term “image” in the sense described by Joachim Paech (“the representative surface that [...] can be detached from the picture and reproduced in many ways with different media properties”), differentiating it from the notion of “picture” (understood as a “real-world object”). (See Paech 2014, 32.)

[22] The photogenic framing of the father and sons from the perspective of the small hut on the lake shore seen in Fig. 24 may exemplify this well. The father brings the boys here to retrieve a small wooden box, but we never see the content of this box or find out what lies inside, because the father dies, and the box sinks with him to the bottom of the lake.

Zvyagintsev's next feature film, *The Banishment* (*Izgnanie*, 2007), expands the theme of the loss of the father into the disintegration of the traditional family, the loss of the mother, the loss of "faith,"[23] the banishment from "paradise," and makes this metareferential layer even more complex with frames composed like paintings, biblical symbolism, and with photographs counterpointing both filmic images and paintings in a dreamlike narrative. Among the many references to paintings there are a couple of examples which seem more relevant for this line of thought. The first is a kind of *mise-en-abyme*: in one of the most powerful sequences of the film we see just before the protagonist's wife undergoes an abortion, how a group of children are working on a jigsaw puzzle, fitting together pieces reproducing Leonardo da Vinci's *Annunciation* [Fig. 29]. The picture is dismembered and spread out on the floor, and as the camera films them from above, the children are not only made part of the ensemble, but they are incorporated within the pattern, overlaid as images over images. The quotation is explicit, it is not a cinematic *tableau vivant* reproduction, the picture alludes, however, to the crucial element in the plot (the possible birth of a child whose father is unknown) emphasizing the possibility of a symbolic reading,[24] and reflects a salient feature of the visual style directing our attention to the recurring static frames that constitute jigsaw puzzle-like *tableaux* in the film [Figs. 30–32] or in which different kinds of images are laid on top of each other [Fig. 33–34]. Mantegna's image of the dead Christ, which was so accurately reproduced and placed at the gravity centre of *The Return*, seems to haunt this film, as well, as elements of the painting resurface in two scenes. In both cases the bodies we see are not dead but in extreme shock: in a reversal of the position of the body we see the father (played by the same actor, Konstantin Lavronenko) stricken with grief, as he collapses after the death of his wife with his face down; and in the flashback sequence we see the wife in a similar position as Christ in the painting with her feet towards the viewer after the attempted suicide [Figs. 35–36]. Focusing this time more on the figure of the woman who is depicted with a dense mesh of pictorial references [Figs. 37–48][25] the film draws a similar circular trajectory from filmic presence, painterly stylization to the photograph as a recording of the moment and object of memory (and back) to the one seen in *The Return*, offering a synthesis in the photo of Vera and her two young children captured in the pose paraphrasing Da Vinci’s *Virgin and Child with St. Anne and John the Baptist* (1499–1500) [Figs. 39–40]. As such, if Pálfi’s use of conceptual “body horror”[26] in *Taxidermia* can be positioned at the extreme of morbid satire (and a narrative literalization of contemporary art’s fetishism of bodies exhibited as objects), Zvyagintsev’s films gracefully weaving together painting, cinema and photography, may be placed on the other pole, as examples for a poetic use of “embodied images” as “embodied ideas.”[27]

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[23] As many reviewers have noted this is emphasized by the fact that the woman is called Vera (the word "vera" meaning "faith" in Russian).

[24] This is reinforced by further quotations in the film. E.g. in a following scene, in which the children are read from the Bible, the bookmark shown in the close up also reveals a fragment from Masaccio's painting, the *Expulsion of Adam and Eve from Eden*, a pictorial reference to the title and the main theme, the banishment from Paradise.

Nostalgia for “the Big Picture”

Regarding this type of films perhaps the most important question is how we should interpret this highly rhetoricized/allegorical mode of expression. Is it a mere extension, an excessive repetition of the modernist models of abstraction that critics usually associate to such films?[28] Should we attribute the phenomenon to Eastern Europe’s peripheral status against Western Europe and global capitalism (taking into account Jameson’s highly controversial assertion about the connection between the allegorical way of expression and “third-worldish”-ness[29]) and to the perpetuation of frustrations caused by social and political crises that pushes artists towards an abstract, fragmented style and the construction of parables?[30] In an insightful analysis Hajnal Király[31] speaks of the sublimation of crisis through beauty and the proliferation of the *tableau*-like compositions in recent Hungarian cinema corresponding to the extended concept of *anamorphosis* as the emergence of the Lyotardian "figural" within the discursive order of the narrative as a complex symptom of *melancholia* (as described by Julia Kristeva), and also as a form of cinematic mannerism. Or we may find in this emphasis on aesthetic stylization of individual images and in this repeated reference to masterpieces of European art the gesture of offering Western audiences tales told in the manner they expect from these cinemas, which, following the heritage of "various post-war national new waves" – considering themselves, and being considered by others superior to industrial films of their time – in the words of Randall Halle (2010, 303), have become "associated with high cultural film art," and in which, therefore, universal themes, references to art history and Christian imagery can be expected signs of sophistication, and these easily recognisable references can facilitate connections to a wider cultural and artistic heritage perhaps as manifestations of a self-colonizing instinct.[32]

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[25] This excess of pictoriality surrounding her is emphasized by the very last image [Fig. 34] that we see of her is her figure standing in front of a giant painting on a wall and blending in with the forms of the graffiti (an image, that reiterates with “secular” forms the structure of the scene where the children work on the puzzle of Leonardo’s *Annunciation*).

[26] This is Shaviro’s syntagm characterizing the film (2012a).

[27] See a quotation from Zvyagintsev’s interview in the *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* published on November 21, 2006: “the father was not simply, and not only a concrete person, but also a certain function, the personification of some concept. [...] The beauty of the world [...] is expressed through the battle in the world of ideas.” Source: *http://366weirdmovies.com/the-banishment-2007/*. Last accessed 15. 07. 2014.

[28] Jancsó’s stylized parables and highly artificial visual style are usually invoked in connection with these Hungarian directors’ preference for the allegorical mode and Tarkovsky or Bergman are usually quoted as precursors for Zvyagintsev (who himself notes the even more determining influence of Antonioni instead).

[29] Cf. “All third-world texts are necessarily […] allegorical, and in a very specific way: they are to be read as what I will call national allegories” – he contends – abolishing “the radical split between the private and the public, between the poetic and the

Then again, we may note that the recurrence of paraphrases of famous paintings alongside "secularizations" of religious iconography, the transmutation of Christian symbols into more universally recognizable patterns that can engage with a multinational audience, and the penchant for *tableau* constructions (and even for triptych formats) also corresponds to an established practice in video and new media art (see for example some of Bill Viola's controversial video installations[33]),

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political. […] The story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society" (Jameson 1986, 69).

[30] See Xavier's assertion that allegories "often emerge from controversies, conflicts of interpretation, confrontations related to struggles for hegemony in a world in which the shock of cultures and the network of material interests and symbolic systems tend to produce instability in people's lives. […] Allegory has acquired a new meaning in modernity more related to the expression of social crisis and the transient nature of values, with special emphasis given to its connection with the sense of the fragmentation, discontinuity, and abstraction" (Xavier 2007, 360).

[31] This is a forthcoming article in *Studies in Eastern European Cinema* titled *Playing Dead: Pictorial Representations of Melancholia in Contemporary Hungarian Cinema* which is highly original in its use of a pictorial model (*anamorphosis*) offering also a welcome alternative to much of previous scholarships speaking about *tableaux vivants* (and intermediality) in terms of textuality and writing.

[32] See a similar approach in Mónika Dánél's essay (2012) that offers a postcolonial reading of some of contemporary Hungarian films.

[33] This connection between traditional religious art and high tech video installations has been recognized in Bill Viola's *The Passions* being exhibited in the cathedral of

so, at least in part, this may prove just as strongly a genuine affinity with what is happening in the field of contemporary art and "expanded cinema."[34] What seems also plausible therefore is that somehow this extraordinary preoccupation with form and allegorical layers of mediation is not just a displacement, a means to avoid addressing issues in a more direct way, but it can be regarded in connection with experimentation and authorship. As opposed to times of dictatorship, the author of contemporary Eastern Europe no longer needs to adopt the stance of a political dissident forced to speak in arthouse style parables; however, facing the deficiencies of institutional backgrounds in filmmaking (and a total lack of demand for East European genre films on global markets), authorship has become the default mode of creativity (with more or less success), with style offering the possibility to exercise absolute control and, in certain cases, to deliberately solidify the "art" component in the "art film" that may guarantee (with the rise of the festival circuit) a global appeal for these films. Accordingly, the carefully crafted single image, the *tableau* form in its expanded sense, has been turned into an agent of asserting creative authorship[35] and authority, of implementing order against chaos.

Moreover, this also happens amid what seems to be a general revival of interest in allegorical forms of expression making use of Christian images and shots devised like paintings identifiable not just across different domains of the arts, but also in a broad spectrum of contemporary fiction films with examples as far ranging as the South Korean Kim Ki-duk's *Pietá* (2012) and the oeuvre of the Mexican author, Carlos Reygadas, that includes similar allegorical films based on religious and archetypal symbolism and *tableaux vivant*-like frames (e.g. *Battle in Heaven* [*Batalla en el cielo*], 2005; *Silent Light* [*Stellet Licht*], 2007; *Post Tenebras Lux*, 2012), often combining aestheticized images with shockingly violent content.

Berne, in Switzerland, and more recently, in the plasma screen installation of *Martyrs (Earth, Air, Fire, Water)* – a work that combines the Christian notion of martyrdom with the universal sensual experience of the four elements – in St Paul's Cathedral in London. See also a series of earlier examples in Mieke Bal's (1999) book length analysis of quotations of Caravaggio in contemporary art.

[34] The strong link between Pálfi's *Taxidermia* and today's art world has already been mentioned. This connection with contemporary video art has also been emphasized by András Bálint Kovács with regards to the cinema of Tarr Béla (2013), and can be observed more directly in the artistic practice of some of these filmmakers – like Benedek Fliegauf – who also experimented with video installations.

[35] Although having a different vantage point, this may also resonate with Klossowski's concept of the *tableau vivant* being essentially not a mere derivative image, a copy, but another original, as summarized by Michael Goddard (2013, 46), the *tableau vivant*: "can be understood as a highly perverse reproductive technique that instead of making an original more exchangeable through the multiplication of copies, would render it absolutely singular through its corporeal actualization in 'living material.'"

Despite all their elements of excess and neo-baroque emphasis on visual language and form,[36] therefore these films in East European cinema are neither eccentric, nor isolated examples of recycled imagery, exhausting a pre-existent set of poetic devices and well-known cultural references in ironic language games. On the one hand, I suggest, this inclination towards artificiality in the image, the challenging of the tactile and the embodied aspect of the cinematic medium in the name of visual objectification, and in the form of the shot we can isolate as an autonomous entity resembling a painting, may be linked to what Mario Perniola considers – in the book leading up to his already quoted idea on the "sex appeal of the inorganic" – "the Egyptian moment in art" (1995). In the opinion of the Italian philosopher, we live in an age of the civilization of "things" and of the "look:" while technology seems to take over the human role in the perception of events, and thus assume organic properties, humans deliberately treat themselves as objects. Perniola finds that in the history of humanity "the Egyptian mummy alone evokes such a radical will to become a thing" (1995, 52), and that people today are engaged in various processes of self-mummification. Moreover, instead of perceiving the world as a "spectacle," we are more inclined to see it in the terms of a "landscape," i.e. something distant, "incomprehensible, foreign and far away" (1995, 52). He also remarks that "*tableaux vivants*, which appear, alongside dance, to have been one of the ancient Egyptians' favourite forms of spectacle, conveyed just this form of *bewilderment and estrangement*. […] They do not attempt a mimetic representation of the action, but focus special attention instead on the particular mimetic physicality of the actor, regarding his/her body as a clothing of flesh […]. This is a more general feature of ancient Egyptian art, which rather than striving to mimic nature, seeks to create things that are independent of it, endowed with equal *dignity and autonomy*, that are as things among things" (Perniola 1995, 45–46, emphasis mine, Á. P.). Accordingly, the *tableau* sequences in these films appear not only like *anamorphic* details emerging within the cinematic frame, but, as such "things among things," endowed with mysterious "dignity and autonomy." Just think of the way Zvyagintsev's boys look at their father trying to identify the image presented to them in the bedroom with the other picture they have of him, the photograph in the attic, a look representing the perplexity of the spectators themselves comparing the cinematic shot with Mantegna's Christ.

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[36] Zvyagintsev declared: "For me the hero of a film is the language of that film." Source: Russia Beyond the Headlines, Twelve Seconds of Meditation. *http://rbth.com/articles/2011/05/30/twelve_seconds_of_meditation_12938.html.* Last accessed 15. 07. 2014.

On the other hand, when humans are treated as pictures, flesh acquires the quality of painted texture or sculptural mass, live bodies are objectified as static images recalling familiar elements of famous paintings in these films, there is also another process taking place: the fluidity of the moving image imitating the "flow of life" becomes visibly contained within a certain aesthetic order and structure, chance movements are substituted by the predetermined spatial organization of a particular picture frame, and by the universality of symbol and the endurance of myth. We may connect this feature of these *tableaux vivants* to what Lyotard termed in his short essay titled *Acinéma* as the "figure of return," i.e. "the folding back of diversity upon an identical unity," "the repetition and propagation of sameness" (Lyotard 1978, 55). Lyotard speaks of the structure of classical narrative films, that, despite their movements of diversity, tend to return to identical patterns or rhythms shaping films as "productive, consumable objects" (1978, 54), as opposed to what he defines as the uncontained movement of "*jouissance*" seen as pure, "unproductive" "fireworks," and "*détournement*" in experimental, avant-garde art. In the references to well-known paintings we may also find a similar movement of "*rétournement*" to a fixed, familiar pattern, repeatedly "absorbing diversity into unity," where this movement is not one that folds cinema, as representation, back onto the world (as in the case of classical narratives), but back onto the interpretive frame of visual arts, channelling cinematic diversity back to recognizable sameness in painting (thus restructuring, reproducing the cinematic image as a "consumable object" for art connoisseur audiences). While, paradoxically, at the same time this may also mean, in a way, a reversal of Lyotard's postmodern principle of replacing grand, universal narratives with small, local narratives: constituting attempts to open up these small, local, often minimalist narratives through the insertion of the "grand image" towards equally grand (biblical, archetypal, mythical) narratives. This movement of "return" symptomatic of a "nostalgia for belonging" or a "nostalgia for tradition" is characteristic of what literary theory has been describing for some time as post-postmodern art.[37]

The repeated reconnection to a universal cultural heritage of "grand images" harnesses their power to coagulate narratives around them, and instead of acting as a disruption, a pause[38] within the flow of narration, the *tableau vivant* becomes the prototype of other repetitions and the focal point of circular movements constructing not so much a linear narrative as offering a blueprint for a "big picture," a comprehensive and suggestive vision of the world (reinforced by the recurring mythological themes of the genesis or the end of the world, the loss of Paradise, archetypal stories of the act of sacrifice, etc.). All of Pálfi's idiosyncrasies and *jouissant* "fireworks" in *Taxidermia* "return" to order and to what Lyotard calls "good form" in the symmetry of the timeless triptych structure (where each historical part constructs a grotesque model for the world, birth and creation being at the core of each of them) and in the final display of the body as archaic torso. Zvyagintsev's *The Return* constructs a circular metanarrative, ritualizing the passage from image to body, and back to image, while in the case of *The Banishment* – from which Zvyagintsev deliberately removed any sign of particular place and time[39] – not only most of the *tableau*-like sequences present grids delimiting pictures within pictures, thus unfolding from parts assembled as a puzzle, but the whole film is presented as an enigma where the viewer should labour on the reconstruction of the whole, big picture, just like the children who reassemble pieces of the reproduction of Da Vinci's painting.

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[37] See a good summary of these ideas in the foreword to the volume *Postmodernism and After. Visions and Revisions* (Rudaitytė, 2008) and also in *Literature after Postmodernism* (Huber, 2014).

[38] See Peucker's assessment of the way the *tableau* works within a narrative (2007, 66).

Finally, we might also ask, why do these films refer to these particular paintings and painters? Why this type of paintings at all? Is this a return to pre-modern art history in deliberate opposition to non-figural, abstract art (that so profoundly resonated with the modernist cinema of Antonioni, for example, the model for the pictorial style of Zvyagintsev)? This is what Steven Shaviro suggests in a detailed analysis of Lars von Trier's *Melancholia* (2011), another recent film envisioning the end of the world and making use of the rhetoric of grandiose *tableaux vivants* alongside references to paintings. Shaviro interprets the scene in which Justine, the neurotic heroine of the story, replaces a set of abstract pictures with images of well-known figurative paintings by Brueghel, Caravaggio, and others as a clear negation of "modernist abstractions, with their rationally ordered geometric grids […] emblematic of social control and instrumental reason" in favour of artworks that "show us a world that is unbalanced, opaque to rationality, and cruelly indifferent to human concerns" (Shaviro 2012b, 28–29). I propose, however, that we should not see the same opposition between order and chaos here. The images reminiscent of Mantegna's or Holbein's Dead Christ or Da Vinci's canvases in these

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[39] While the impression of universality is also reinforced by the use of an international cast and by blending in among quotations of European paintings in the film pictures resembling the works of the American painter Andrew Wyeth. Thus Zvyagintsev trumps Tarkovsky's nostalgia for European art (and through it, for Europeanness) manifest throughout his career with a nostalgia for universal art, or perhaps, more simply, with a nostalgia in cinema for the art of painting (regardless of its cultural context).

East European films bring their own "grids" and "patterns" to impose coherence (even if this is merely an artistic one), to contain the image and to carry their own set of biblical metanarratives to fold over and frame the story they are embedded in.

At the same time, it is undeniable, that both through the excess of signification enfolded in the paintings, as well as through our own complex bewilderment in experiencing them, through the "shadow"[40] – to quote another of Perniola's concepts – that art leaves behind, "a not so bright silhouette, in which is portrayed anything disquieting and enigmatic that belongs to it" (Perniola 2004b, xvi), they do provide, quite similarly to Lars Von Trier's opus, "dangerous access to archaic and disproportionate forces," (Shaviro 2012b, 29) adding a surplus of weight and a puzzling opacity to these films representative of a post-postmodern aesthetics returning to stories of mythical grandeur, and equally grand images. And while the narratives present the failure of their characters to become heroes of mythical proportion, the films themselves can be viewed as metafictional allegories of this very urge for reconstruction, reinstatement, and re-embodiment of myths. By repeatedly showing us bodies dying into art, and ideas reified as images, these films present us over and over again with rituals of "becoming an image," with a yearning for a reintegration into something universal and lasting, surrendering to the "sex appeal of the inorganic." At the same time along with this movement towards objectification, circular structures, and stasis, however, the *tableau vivant* also performs, paradoxically, a movement of "*détournement*," both by placing the cinematic image into the much less stable "shadow of the arts," and by consistently counterpointing the aestheticism of the *tableau* constructions with a subversive emphasis on bodies and senses, establishing – in Perniola's words, as mentioned before (2004a, 1) – a fragile alliance between "the most detached abstraction and the most unrestrained excitement."

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[40] The "shadow" is a term that Perniola introduced in his volume of essays, *Art and its Shadow* (2004b), which substitutes Benjamin's notion of "aura," something that also indicates a major shift: from placing the individual art object with its aura in the centre of the discourse on art to thematizing the complex framework that we perceive around (or more precisely, to use Perniola's words, "at the side of") it instead. As Hugh J. Silverman explains in the Foreword to this book: "shadows 'stand' alongside works of art. They delineate the shape of works of art. And in the shadows come the 'more subtle and refined experience, more intense and attentive to the work'[…] remainders, crypts, shadows are the non-space that accompany art and give it meaning – not the content of the particular works of art that we confront in museums, in catalogues, in books, on the street, and in the electronic media. These shadows accompany each and every experience of art – as trauma, as disgust, as splendour, as grandeur, as exceptional . . . as the sex appeal of the inorganic." (Perniola 2004b, ix–x, xiii.)

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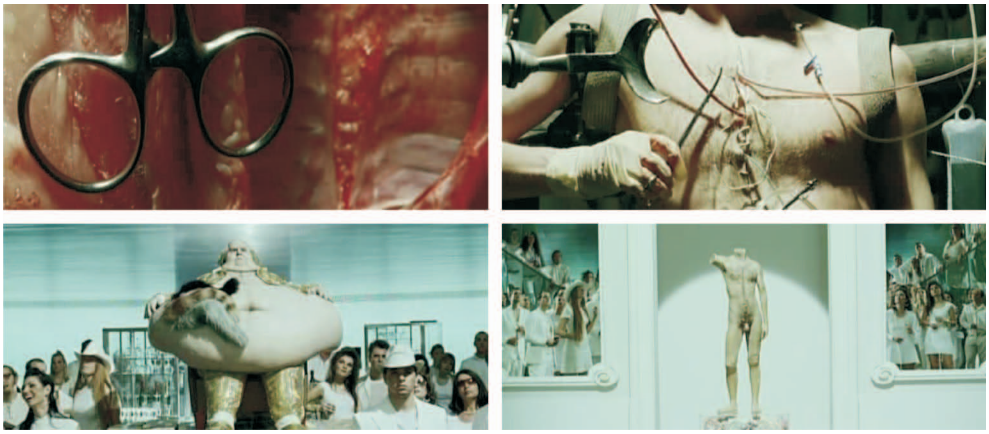

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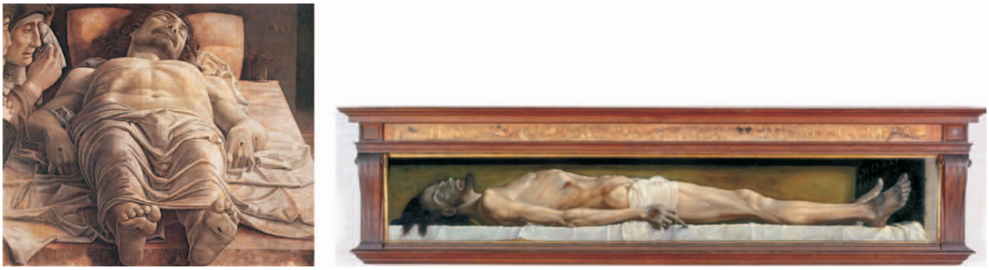

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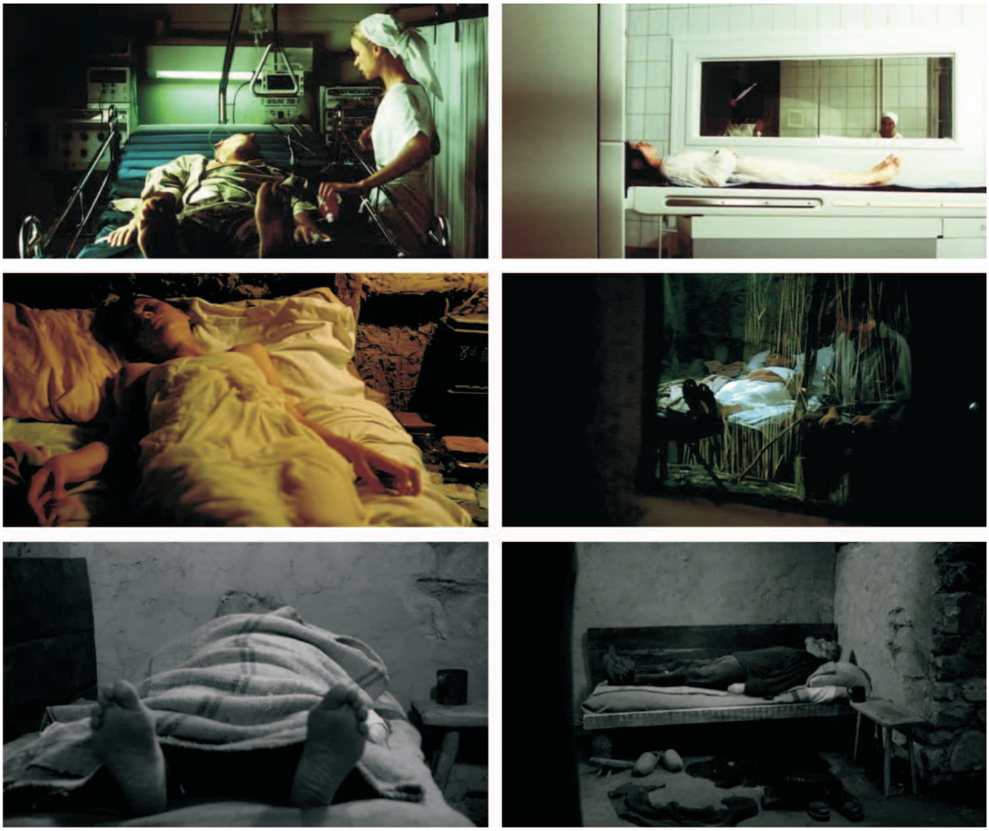

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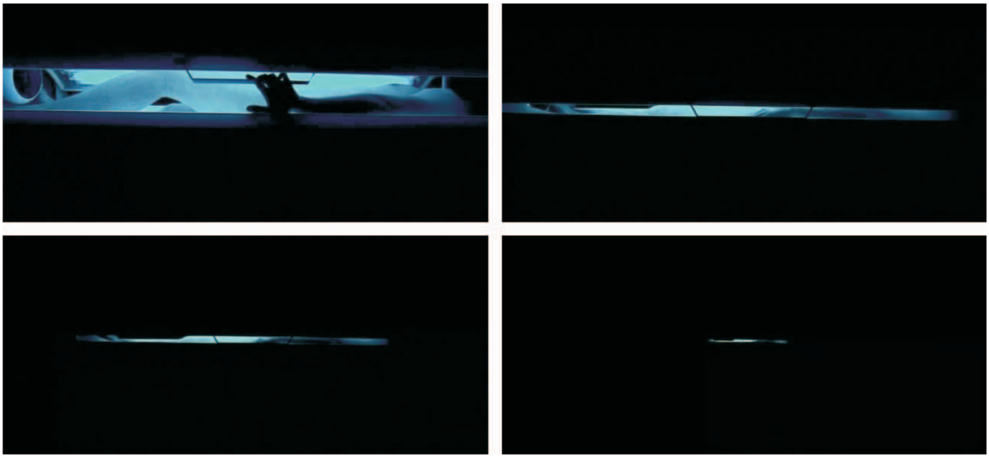

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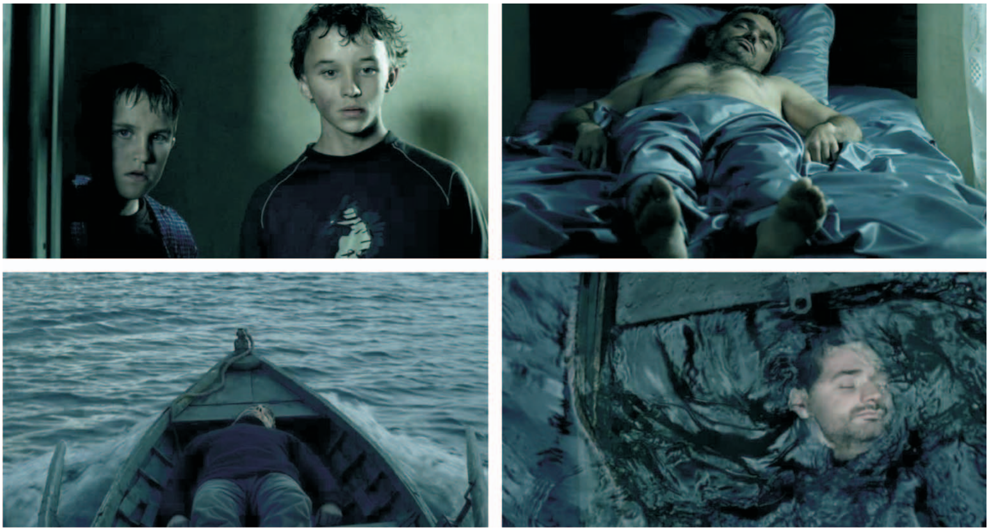

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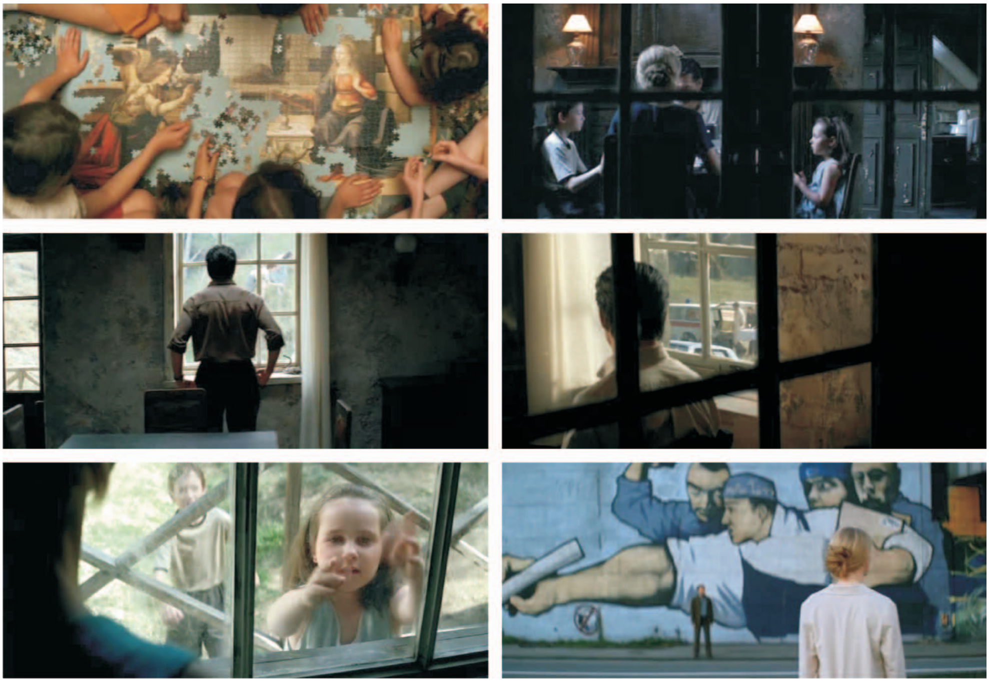

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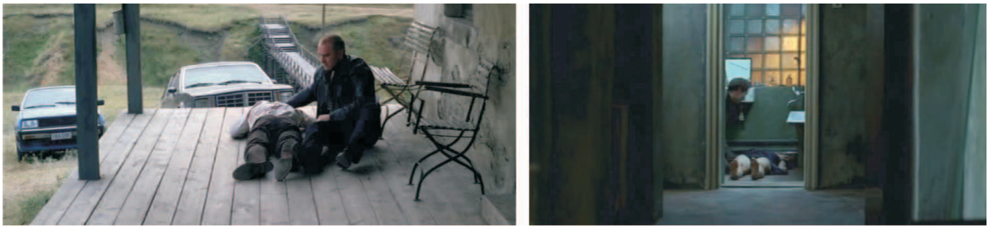

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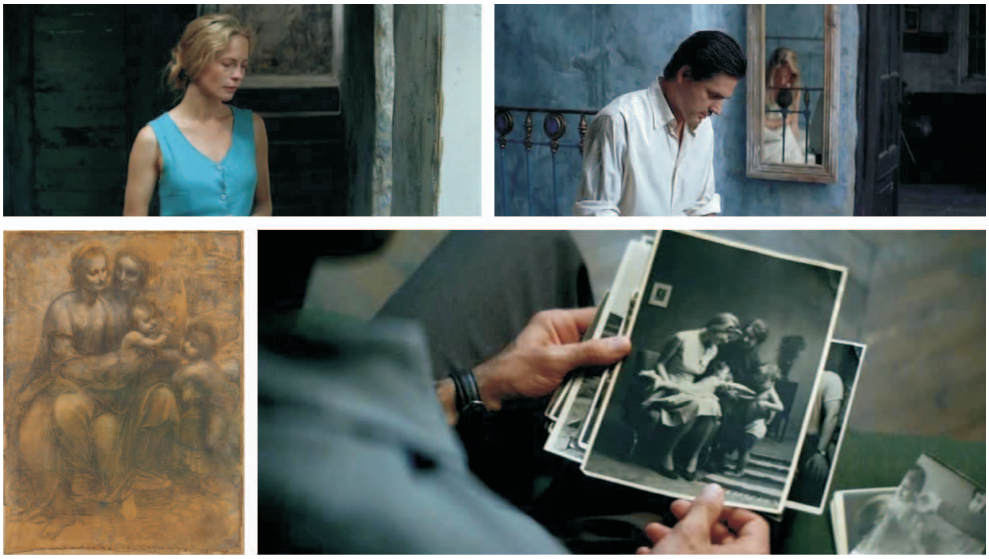

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V-v-Vertov R-r-Re-made

From Avant-garde Documentary to Participatory Culture: the Digital Journey of Man with a Movie Camera

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Abstract. The seminal work of pioneering avant-garde filmmaker Dziga Vertov, *The Man with the Movie Camera* (*Chevolek s kino-apparatom*, 1929) has given rise to a number of discussions about the documentary film genre and new digital media. By way of comparison with American artist Perry Bard's online movie project entitled *Man With a Movie Camera: The Global Remake* (2007), this article investigates the historical perspective of this visionary depiction of reality and its impact on the heralded participatory culture of contemporary digital media, which can be traced back to Russian Constructivism. Through critical analysis of the relation between Vertov's manifest declarations about the film medium and his resulting cinematic vision, Bard's project and the work of her chief theoretical inspiration Lev Manovich are examined in the perspective of "remake culture," participatory authorship and the development a documentary film language. In addition to this, possible trajectories from Vertov and his contemporary Constructivists to recent theories of "new materialism" and the notion of Man/Machine-co-operation is discussed in length.

Keywords: online documentary, participatory culture, digital culture, Russian Constructivism, film history, new materialism.

> *Vertov would likely declare a death sentence on the theatricality of imagining any reconstruction as the last word. He would insist upon the revolution in reality, the future improvements of the past, made possible – and visible and audible – as only the machine could make them.*
>
> Seth Feldman imagining the content of a contemporary manifesto written by Vertov (2007, 46.)

Introduction: Vertov and Bard

Dziga Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929) is as an inevitable work within the history of avant-garde cinema. There are a number of reasons why this 68 minute long portrayal of urban Soviet life has been celebrated and echoed through subsequent films, filmic movements, and theoretical practices. One of the most obvious and exemplified is the film's creation of an impressive and downright overwhelming vocabulary of formalistic innovations and creative recording methods. In a historical perspective, it is the combination of these film technical experiments with a specific ideology and a pronounced artist manifesto that has made *Man with a Movie Camera* a work of art, which has had a radical impact that reaches far beyond the traditional confines of cinema and into the workings of today's broader media landscape – at least according to some commentators and among these perhaps most notably software theoretician Lev Manovich, whose writings about Vertov's work, on a number of different levels, will be of crucial interest to the present article.

A reflection of this technical – and perhaps also socio-cultural – breakthrough in Vertov's film filtered through Manovich's analysis (2001) serves as the central point of departure for a study of the participatory online film *Man with a Movie Camera: The Global Remake* (*http://dziga.perrybard.net*). This project was initiated by American artist Perry Bard in 2007. As the title suggests, it is a reworking of Dziga Vertov's iconic film, but it is also concretely inspired by aforementioned Manovich's reading of Vertov's film, in which he in details sketches the lineage between Vertov's project and the so-called "language of new media" of contemporary digital culture.

The net-based version of Bard's radical take on the documentary film consists of visual material uploaded by users and fitted into Vertov's original temporal framework, double-screened online next to the original. This is all done automatically by a piece of software commissioned by Bard and developed by John Weir specifically for this work. By means of an algorithm, random recordings are picked from a continuously updated, user-generated database of contemporary footage [Fig. 1–2].

As the premise for our investigations, we will consider this aspect of Bard's remake to be the comparable equivalent to the privileged and complex position of the post-productive process of editing in Vertov's original. In both works, it is in fact a combination of the access to the world granted through the recording device (or in Bard's case the ubiquitously present recording devices) combined with the technological restructuring of this material that creates the basis for a fundamental reinterpretation of the medium, its social function and its potential as a common, linguistic expression.

However, as a remake, Bard's project is seemingly marked by a double ambition concerning Vertov's classic work. On the one hand, Bard attempts to make Vertov contemporary, that is, to bring the original up to speed with the "present level of development" of media (Benjamin 2008b, 90).[1] On the other hand, it is, of course, also an homage to Vertov, which, at least potentially, occasions the project with a somewhat retrospective aspect. As Vertov's work, Bard's remake was also made for public screenings. In this sense, as we will argue below, Bard's project echoes some of Walter Benjamin's thoughts on cinema and the movie theatre of especially the 1920s – perhaps concretely inspired by Vertov's depiction of the cinema-goers as a crowd? – as sites of "simultaneous collective experience" (2008b, 36) or "communal viewing" (Feldman 2010). Here the "masses come face to face with themselves" (Benjamin 2008a, 54) in a double sense: they can experience themselves *depicted as a crowd* in ways previous media could not (especially due to innovative experiments with camera angles and the composition of the shot); and they can *experience this as a crowd*, that is, together. Yet, as we will discuss, there is also another aspect of both experienced and practiced collectivity at stake in both projects (although in Vertov's mostly in embryonic form), namely that of collective production – or as it is often referred to in contemporary theory: co-production or co-creation.

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[1] The fact that Bard's project won an honorary mention in the Digital Communities

Documentary and the Avant-Garde

According to the manifesto presented in the title sequence from Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera*, the film was in many ways the culmination of the director's overall ambition – in accordance with the notion of communism as a potentially global project – to forge a new filmic language of pure visual communication, the so-called Kino-Pravda ("Film Truth"), which was sometimes also referred to, or translated as "Absolute Kinography:"

> "The *Man with the Movie Camera*
> (An Excerpt from the Diary of a Cameraman)
> ATTENTION VIEWERS:
> *THIS FILM*
> Represents in Itself
> AN EXPERIMENTATION IN THE CINEMATIC COMMUNICATION
> Of visual events
> WITHOUT THE AID OF INTERTITLES
> (A Film Without Intertitles)
> WITHOUT THE AID OF A SCENARIO

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category at Ars Electronica in 2008 does, of course, signal that Bard to some extent has achieved this ambition: this art/network of cinematic co-production, is – and not least: signals that it is – a "comrade of time" (Groys 2010).

(A Film Without a Script)
WITHOUT THE AID OF THEATER
(A Film Without Sets, Actors, etc.)
THIS EXPERIMENTAL WORK WAS MADE WITH THE INTENTION OF CREATING A TRULY INTERNATIONAL ULTIMATE LANGUAGE OF CINEMA ON THE BASIS OF ITS TOTAL SEPARATION FROM THE LANGUAGE OF THEATER AND LITERATURE[2]

This was to be achieved by purging the film medium from all the conventions that belonged to older, bourgeois art forms like theatre, literature, and their related creative expressions. It was Vertov's belief, that these creative expressions were defining characteristics of the staged film and therefore "antithetical to the spirit of the revolutionary times which required the cinema's goals to be in direct political alignment with those of the new socialist reality."[3] Instead, he sought to replace these inherited conventions with an accentuation of new technically-based visual means of communication, that is montage, inventive camera work, and a variety of "special effects" made possible through this new medium.

Another important aspect, the notion of Absolute Kinography addressed, was the problems of geography and language barriers that the internationally aspiring communist state Soviet Russia was trying to overcome at the time. "The basis for our program," Vertov noted, "is a film bond between the peoples of the USSR and the entire world based on the decoding of what actually exists" (Fore 2010, 376). At the core of Vertov's poetology was thus the idea that the "visual language" of film would potentially be more unmediated, less marred by conventions, and thus not subject to the same kind of translational problems as for instance spoken language (not to mention the highly conventionalized bourgeois art forms).

In the context of the historical and comparative study presented here, it is important to take into account the critical reception of Vertov's film. When first presented, the director's revolutionary vision did not find a strong foothold among the Soviet public and contrary to his intentions, it was ignored by the masses. Furthermore, many of his contemporary peers found the film to be "inaccessible" and a strictly formal experiment.[4] As such, the immediate response and fate of the film was typical for the reception of the avant-garde; Vertov's vision of an ambitious, universally appreciated film language was met with misconception, scepticism, and lack of interest. Only gradually did the reception of *The Man with the Movie Camera* change from the strictly technical virtuosity of the film to a more nuanced focus on the deeper aspects of its cinematic and ideological repercussions.

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[2] In the quoted manifesto for *The Man with the Movie Camera*, this is further formulated as Absolute Kinography, the formalistically and ideologically challenging development of Vertov's newsreel productions and what was to become his last silent film. Inherent to the term Kino-Pravda where not only the truth-seeking ambition of the documentary movement, but also its political motivation obviously signaled through the direct referencing of the official party newspaper.

[3] As formulated by Vlada Petrić in his extensive study of Vertov's film and its connection to constructivism (Petrić 1987, 4).

In this perspective, it is interesting to note, how the work in time has been bestowed with a canonical and defining status in connection to the development and understanding of new digital media. Here, the central focus has mostly been on the formalistic merits of Vertov's work. The most influential and indeed in its own right canonical examples of this reception is the aforementioned software theoretician Lev Manovich's positioning of *The Man with the Movie Camera* as an avant-garde blueprint for the montage-oriented mode of expression that has defined the development of digital media, that is, a purely visual organisation of the collected information (Manovich 2001, 239–240). We shall return later to this perception of Vertov's film as a structure which is comparable to the database and vice versa.

Another aspect to consider, but one that is surprisingly often faded into the background in the new media-historical readings of Vertov's work, is the intrinsic link between the technological conception presented through the film and an immediate understanding of the documentary as genre. Since Vertov's manifestly declared interest was to combine these two aspects in a radical different media expression: a new filmic language that redefines both the technical use *and* the conventions of depicting reality, it seems only reasonable to also invest a critical understanding of the remake in the reception of the original that went before its canonisation as a benchmark for understanding the development of new media.

As pointed out by radio and film historian Erik Barnouw, Vertov's career as a documentary filmmaker began in 1917–19 as an editor for the Cinema Committee in Moscow. Here his task was to assemble the incoming fragments of recordings into meaningful newsreels, which were then distributed by "agit-trains" and "agit-steamboats" across the country. The intention behind these films was of course highly propagandistic, but the organising principle of gathering recordings and creating an edited whole to be screened afterwards certainly appears as a noticeable connection between early Vertov and Bard's project. On an ironic historical note, one of the defining characteristics in Bard's ongoing collection of amateur recordings is our mobile technological ability – and tendency – to document everything we see, whereas a shortage of raw film during the revolution almost resulted in the impossibility to make any more newsreel documentaries at the time (Barnouw 1993, 52–55).

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[4] Petrić points out that Vertov's famous contemporary Sergei Eisenstein even went so far as to call the film trickery (Petrić 1987, 78).

Concerning the other aspect of Vertov's filmmaking, his gradually radical experimentation with the formal structure of the documentary, this is what truly separates the original film from the remake and as we shall discuss later, what establishes two distinctly different filmic effects. Indeed it could be argued that *The Man with the Movie Camera*, which epitomises Vertov's groundbreaking work with technical experimentation (at the time under Stalinist view accused for being "formalism," which, of course, was the fate of almost any progressive Soviet art work of the period) is as much a film about "the magic of the medium," as it is a reflection about the medium itself. As so many other avant-garde ambitions, the intentions of Vertov can be seen as a double bind. Not only does he show us the world in a different light. But the poetic inspiration that makes this possible also takes on unintended meaning and even threatens to implode the powerful vision. Obvious examples could be the famous scene in which a movie theater "magically" comes to life with the chairs folding into place through stop-motion editing or as a whole frenetic, mechanical speed that drives most of the effects in the film and eventually makes it almost visually "collapse" [Fig. 3–4]. This does not necessarily signal a crisis of representation, but it places Vertov's film in an uncomfortable position halfway between visionary triumph and the excess of experimentation. Either way it places him firmly in an avant-garde tradition that desperately tries to break the boundaries of genre and define a new type of cinematic imagery. In his seminal work on documentary film, Bill Nichols even accentuates the ironic historical perspective on Vertov's specific form of essentialist cinema. He calls attention to the fact that Jean Rouch and Edgar Morin coined the term *cinéma vérité* (French for Kino Pravda), as an homage to Vertov, even though his avant-garde sensibilities precisely never motivated him to coin the genre "documentary." A phrase intended to signal the privileged access to the truth through the medium of film, ended up being associated with a "delimited sub-genre of participatory documentary" (Nichols 2001, 144).

In this perspective, one might even argue, that Vertov, despite the fierce critique of Art-with-a-capital-A he expressed in for instance the manifesto of the opening titles of *Man With a Movie Camera*, actually continues the so-called "speculative tradition" of modern art and aesthetic thinking, as it has been coined by Jean-Marie Schaeffer (2000), by praising the new cinematic art as yet another speculative enterprise. Although this happens in a much more directly mediated sense than most aesthetic philosophers of the 18–19th centuries imagined, it nonetheless goes to show that Vertov's cinematic enterprise and its preoccupation with what we might term "ocular truth" is not that alien from one of the main trajectories of modern art, as he himself would have claimed. To this, one could also mention his obvious inclination towards, or at least: reluctance to let go of the figure of auteurship (cf. it's about *the man* with the movie camera).

Camera, Ideology, and (Scientific) Truth

Integral to the genre-analytical focus on this challenge of the documentary form and the use of filmic effects is the equally important socio-cultural aspect of *The Man with the Movie Camera*. As pointed out by film scholar Annette Michelson, Vertov ultimately aimed to optimize both the art of "decoding life as it is" and the communicative transference of this flow of information onto the viewer in the service of communist "revelation" (Michelson 1984, xiv). Following this, it seems no coincidence that Vertov's movie (and subsequently also Bard's remake) exhibits communication technologies and use of media in abundance: both *recording* and *playing* devices as well as telephones, telegraphs, and so on; of course also including the different *settings* of mass communication, most famously the aforementioned meta-significance of the movie theatre. As an indicative coincidence, those scenes involving communication technologies and the specific situations related to them, are the ones that most often get remade for Bard's project. Yet, as we will argue below, this is, in fact, no coincidence at all. It might instead be the logical result of Bard technologically orchestrating not all the recordings of the camera, but all the cameras recording [Fig. 5].

Vertov's double agenda of *recording* and *revealing* manifested itself on a number of levels: Most notably, through – at the time – pioneering ocular intrusions into hitherto unseen everyday, intimate locations like the bedroom, the birth bed, and the divorce registration office – most of them "accessed" through new visual perspectives. This reflects the socio-cultural setting of the camera and cinema within communist Soviet society proposed by Vertov, namely, what he refers to as an epistemologically privileged "Communist decoding of reality" (Vertov 1984, 50), thus postulating this epistemological capacity as the common denominator of the camera and Marxism-as-science, which was the way it was perceived in Russia at that time (Fer 1989), rather than as a political ideology competing with other ideologies as it was later to be perceived as. Indicative of this, Vertov himself explicitly draws parallels between the eye-opening experience of the complex structures in his own films and "serious essays by Engels and Lenin" (Drobashenko 1966, 71).

These ideas are similar to the way Walter Benjamin, immediately after having discussed Russian cinema and the technique of montage, described how the relationship between the camera and reality was often perceived. In a number of Benjamin's writings on the technology of the camera and its epistemological capabilities, we thus find numerous phrasings that emphasize the close relationship between the camera and the new sciences of the time. Drawing parallels to Sigmund Freud's *Psychopathology of Everyday Life* (1901), which according to the first draft of Benjamin's so-called Artwork-essay "isolated and made analyzable things which had heretofore floated along unnoticed in the broad stream of perception," the emergence of film "has brought about a similar deepening of apperception" (Benjamin 1998). "It is through the camera," Benjamin notes, "that we first discover the optical unconscious, just as we discover the instinctual unconscious through psychoanalysis" (2008a, 37). Thus, it also becomes "another nature which speaks to the camera as compared to the eye. 'Other' above all in the sense that a space informed by human consciousness gives way to a space informed by the unconscious" (2008a, 37). Similarly, Benjamin in another passage also points to this technology-induced change in our human apparatus of perception, although this time drawing analogies between the surgeon and the cameraman. Whereas the painter "maintains in his work a natural distance from reality, [...] the cinematographer penetrates deeply into its tissue" (2008a, 35). This operation "brings to light entirely new structures of matter" (2008a, 37), as Benjamin puts it, hereby – perhaps not consciously; it is most likely something he picked up indirectly through Sergei Tretjakov (Fore 2006a), whom he specifically drew on in his essay from 1943, "The Author as Producer" (2008b), or during his visit to Russia in 1926–27 – alluding to the scientific work on so-called "tektology" done by Aleksandr Bogdanov in the preceding decade. We will return to this particular lineage in more detail below. Suffice to say for now, Vertov on many levels actually seems to be the case Benjamin is thinking of, when he claims that to "demonstrate the identity of the artistic and scientific uses of photography which heretofore usually were separated will be one of the revolutionary functions of the film" (1998).

Vertov's double agenda of *recording* and *revealing* did, however, also manifest itself by way of the camera's playful self-exploration. In sequence after sequence, daring and imaginative stunts are performed to illustrate the explorative relation between the recording device and the world [Fig. 6–7]. As pointed out by

Seth Feldman: "the engine of Vertov's generative power is a creative dialectic between his two central ideas – Life Caught Unawares (that is the dedication to an unmediated recording of reality) and the Kino-eye (an equally emphatic commitment to presenting the world through the enhanced vision of machines)" (Feldman 2010). In this there is, of course, an obvious paradox, namely, the fact that the (seemingly) unmediated reality revealed by the camera is fundamentally a product of the operations of the media itself. Or as put by Benjamin: "the presentation of reality in film [...] provides the equipment-free aspect of reality [...], and does so precisely on the basis of the most intensive interpretation of reality with equipment" (2008a, 35). Thus, in this sense *The Man with the Movie Camera* simultaneously investigates its own artistic means *and* the (potential) socio-cultural settings of the camera and cinema within communist Soviet society.

Re-Make Culture – Reimagining, Remixing, or Remastering?

As mentioned earlier, Vertov's fascination with the medium takes on an almost delirious form by the ending of the film, with multitudes of superimposed images and a greatly accelerated editing speed. It certainly appears like the "personified" camera has some difficulties comprehending the overwhelming pulse of modern life, or at least Vertov's concluding presentation of the recorded footage signals a chaotic, kaleidoscopic, and imposing overflow of visual information.

This is, however, an aspect of the film's reception, which is not discussed that often, and it is also left out of Manovich's buoyant media genealogical interpretation of Vertov's avant-garde experiment. Yet, if this is the case, how should it then be interpreted? Is this really Vertov's implicit critique of the "scientific urge" (Alifragkis and Penz 2009, 145) of contemporary Soviet society, and in particularly the conception that the camera could intrude anywhere and neutrally channel and "decode life as it is?" And could it perhaps even be interpreted as a critique of the "informational ideology" in more general terms – and if so: could it have some bearing on contemporary thought? Is this apparent "information overload" in other words the exact moment Vertov displays the "right tendency" (*Tendenz*) Benjamin would most likely have expected from him (Benjamin 2008b, 80–81)?

However, if we, like most interpretations, simply ignore this apparent "break down" at the end of *The Man with the Movie Camera*, Vertov's cinematic project could actually in quite meaningful ways be perceived as some kind of "preinfinite bandwidth" – approached akin to the one later promoted by George Gilder in his book on the socio-cultural, political, and economic promises of the infinite bandwidth of the coming age of Telecosm (2000). According to this quite early, seminal diagnosis of the Internet (in particular fiber optics as a technology of distribution), a host of Modernity's greatest problems and conflicts could potentially be resolved by the emergence of infinite bandwidth Internet and the communication power it brings along, which, among other things, would empower anyone with sufficient information (for instance to access the archive of cultural artifacts, knowledge, facts, etc.). But if we contrary to this understanding take into the account the information overload – reading of the final scenes in Vertov's movie, that we are proposing here, it actually becomes quite paradoxical that Guilder himself explicitly drew on Vertov's and the Stenberg Brothers' visuals on the cover of his book arguing for a happier and more prosperous, information-based future [Fig. 8–9]. Tapping *this* unreflected onto the "engineering iconography" of the Constructivists (Taylor 2006, 454), the material packaging of Gilder's utopian techno-vision, definitely comes off as both a more ideologically and historically predetermined remake of the experimental "machine aesthetics" that permeates the imagery of Vertov and his contemporaries.

However, according to Lev Manovich (1999, 2001, 2013), whom Perry Bard explicitly mentions as the *key* inspiration for her work, the efforts by Dziga Vertov (and a number of like-minded avant-garde artists) did, in fact, turn out to be the building blocks of new media and contemporary computer culture, as we know it today, but in quite another way than Gilder envisioned. Manovich even claims that morphologically speaking, the newness of new media is really highly exaggerated: "the allegedly unique principles of new media can already be found in cinema" (2001, 11). For example, the various forms of montage explored by Vertov has, according to Manovich, played a crucial role in the invention of overlapping windows in HCI, as well as in establishing a broader notion of remixing the archive/database.

He already addresses the idea of modularity in his definition of the database as "symbolic form." Here the subdivision of the digital artifacts into objects is defined with a specific emphasis on their accessibility (the user's navigation of the database), a media-specific characterisation that points towards the exchangeability of the different elements, which comprises the whole. This leads on to Manovich's central interest in "the projection of the ontology of a computer onto culture itself," which is determined by the double logic of data structures and algorithms, that is, the basic technical terms for organisation of information and the operation performed for a specific task. This relationship is further mirrored in the database and the narrative, Manovich's central concepts for the understanding of new media objects and their link to earlier cultural expressions. As he points out, in their essence, they are all databases, since every element is part of an interchangeable structure. Thus, in Manovich's following genealogy between avant-garde film and digital media, his reading of Vertov's film is primarily focused on its merging of database and narrative in the presentation of documented reality. One of the most notable points derived from this characterisation of *The Man with the Movie Camera* as database cinema is the interpretation of media form as filmic content. It accentuates one of the features, which makes the film so consistently relevant for our understanding of digital media: it is a continuous demonstration of photographic images turned into film effects through editing and composition (Manovich 2001, 241–242). In this perspective, one could argue that the film to a certain degree is dictated by the self-exploration of the medium – with each new discovery of the world through the camera, another scene is added to the collection, a collection that does indeed appear endlessly alterable because of the ingenious and continuously accelerated editing. This is precisely what constitutes the avant-garde positioning of the film and certainly also what motivates Manovich's interest in establishing Vertov as an avant-garde predecessor for both digital media and his own theory about its language structure. As pointed out by Seth Feldman, this perspective on the avant-garde lifts the film out of a strictly modernist understanding of documentary (according to which Vertov's film is perceived as the less technologically developed version of *cinema vérité*) towards what he determines as a post-modern appropriation, that is, a McLuhanesque condition, where new media is constructed out of, and incorporates older media.[5] This further results in anachronism losing its conventional meaning, and as Feldman eloquently and interestingly puts it "The past becomes that which can be re-mastered – and was never anything else" (Feldman 2007, 45). In the case of Bard's remake, the obvious examples of these aspects of variability and automation would be how John Weir's software daily re-edits the film (by randomly circulating the uploaded scenes). This software algorithm thus becomes comparable to a creative co-producer of the screened filmic remake. Following Feldman's radical understanding of remastering, one could even consider these algorithmic presentations of the documentary content from the user-generated database to be, if not the aesthetically satisfying, then the logical fate of Vertov's vision. Afterall, on a material level *The Global Remake* does indeed present the reconstruction of reality as something endlessly interchangeable, and by using Vertov as its formalistic inspiration makes us question to which degree the remaking-process is taking place in the territory of remastering or remixing.

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[5] This media-genealogy is Feldman's interpretation of the heritage from McLuhan found in Manovich's definition of *new*, digital media (Feldman 2007, 45–46).

Speaking of remixing in the light of Bard's work, might in the end be somewhat misleading, because the remake begs crucial questions concerning the relationship between the technique of montage and the "found"/pre-existing visual material; especially given the fact that only "original" uploaded material (that is: material which does not violate any copyright) is allowed. Where is the "re" in the "mix"?, one might ask, since the form – that is: the temporal fitting of the different scenes – is already given, and the database on the other hand is virtually non-existent having fundamentally been transformed into yet another "zero-stock," just-in-time production facility. (This last aspect has, of course, changed during the now 5 year lifespan of the project.) How is the idea of the remixed archive of found visual material sustainable at all, if the "pre-existence" and "foundness" of the submitted material primarily seems to be illusory and to some extent a by-product of the fact that it is predominantly recorded by mobile devices and their "proximity to reality"-effect. This seems to make "reality itself" the archive material, rather than the visual recordings thereof, and as such invokes the expanded concept of remastering, much more than the deconstructive notions of the remix.

Comradely Media

Vertov's work is permeated by a visible excitement about the technological possibilities of this – at the time – fairly new art form. In his writings on film, the camera even takes on anthropomorphic qualities and it is treated like an autonomous entity: "I am kino-eye, I am a mechanical eye. I, a machine, show you the world as only I can see it" (Michelson 1984, 60). In her (re)interpretation of this constructivist manifesto, Bard goes so far as to determine Vertov's statement like the description of a cyborg, as a perceiving subject halfway between human and machine (or perhaps within the frame of "posthumanism") [Fig. 10].

But maybe the notion of cyborgs (or posthumanism) isn't the only way to look at this? Maybe Man and machine/technology/media are not fused within Man, or within the machine for that sake, but in the world out there, that is, in a much "flatter ontology" (DeLanda 2004). Indicative of this could be the way Vertov's intense preoccupation with the medium sometimes actually seems to suggest that the recording device takes on the role as trigger mechanism for human activity. This is illustrated quite literally in the opening sequence from the movie theater, where the projection of the film seems to animate life and make the entire orchestra awake from their exaggerated, frozen postures. This points to another crucial theme in Vertov's movie, namely human co-operation and co-habitation with new machinery and technology (primarily industry, transportation, and communication, including the camera and the all apparatuses of the movie theatres). In more contemporary theoretical terms, particularly those of the so-called "new materialism" (inspired by Latournian Actor-Network-Theory), one would say that all these technologies – or "things" as they are often referred to in this school of thought in order to sublate the traditional Subject/Object-distinction, which is always anthropocentric – exist on the same level as men (and women) and to a large extent posses the same degree of agency; hence also the term "actants" (rather than "actor") applied to all the entities present in the hybrid ontology of the social ensemblage (Latour 1996).

Once again, there is a thread back to Vertov's time, which astoundingly seldom has been pointed out, if ever. Within Constructivist literature of the 1920s, the term 'factography' was evoked to describe a double function of things, objects, or in this case literary language. Quoting Tretjakov, Devin Fore thus notes that factography actually "had nothing to do with the 'naive and lying verisimilitude' of bourgeois realism's aesthetic of resemblance. Rather, its interventionist, operative aesthetic called upon the producer 'not simply to depict life, but to create it anew in the process'" (Fore 2006b, 101). Parallel to this, Benjamin once again actually comes close to nailing it, claiming that "film is thus the first artistic medium which is able to show how matter plays havoc with human beings [*wie die Materien dem Menschen mitspielt*].[6] It follows that films can be an excellent means of materialistic exposition" (2008a, 47). The important addition to this should be, that in Vertov's case, the camera is not univocally attributed an epistemologically privileged position somewhere outside *looking in* or *at* (and subsequently able to display it, cf. "exposition"), but rather on the very same level of Man and matter. The camera does not just show this entanglement; or if so, it *shows by example*, namely: by performing this very kind of interaction itself. Thus, as mentioned before, the camera itself – perhaps somewhat mystically, especially to those of us that are not accustomed to the materialist thought of Constructivism

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[6] Obviously, the English translation in this particular passage is unfortunately not sufficiently precise to capture how Benjamin seems to imagine matter and humans as "players on the same field."

– occasionally seems to animate the world. A point that of course becomes even more pressing in contemporary media-saturated society, where ubiquitous media to a much larger degree than previously are not just representations, but also real objects that have actual functions within the world (Bolter and Grusin 2001, 58). In fact, one could perhaps even argue that this is also the overall theme of Bard's project: the new affordances of creative cooperation of digital media technologies, and how the latter perhaps even have become co-participants in the remastering of the material (and ideational) world.

In both Vertov and Bard – as well as in the contemporary material cultures within which they respectively are situated and operate – machines and the relationship between them and us, do mean a great deal. Thus, as already indicated, a particularly interesting precursor can be found in post-revolutionary Soviet Russia, where the political levelling of the Man/Object-relation can be found in Russian Constructivism and its particular materialism. In 1927, Aleksandr Rodchenko famously stated that "the light from the East is in the new relation to the person, to woman, to things. Our things in our hands must be equals, comrades, and not these black and mournful slaves, as they are here" (Kiaer 2005, 1). In a vein similar to this "reist utopia" (Margolin 1997, 10) anticipated by Rodchenko, co-constructivists El Lissitzky andand Ilya Ehrenburg had in 1922 declared that: "to us art is the CREATION of NEW OBJECTS…. But it should by no means be supposed that by objects we mean household articles. Of course we see genuine art in utilitarian objects produced in factories, in the airplane or the automobile. But we do not wish to limit the production of artists to utilitarian objects. Any organized work – a HOUSE, a POEM or a PAINTING – is an EXPEDIENT OBJECT ('*tselesoobraznaia veshch*') that does not isolate people from life but helps them to organized it" (Kiaer 2005, 14). Thus, as pointed out by Christina Kiaer, a substantial part of the statements and practices of Russian Constructivism can actually be seen as a way of trying to elaborate a notion of the true "comradely object of socialist modernity;" or simply: "socialist objects" or "the object-as-comrade" (Kiaer 2005, 1); an ambition which, of course, ought to be seen in opposition to the reified, fetishistic relationship western man had to the capitalist commodity. Constructivism's much debated attempts to assign a new social function to art at the service of the Revolution – which was framed as an "UNCOMPROMISING WAR ON ART!," as Alexei Gan famously put it also in 1922 (Gan 1974, 37), and which Vertov echoes in his opening titles – was not merely about art, but even more importantly: about figuring out a new way of approaching and handling materiality, thus attributing it a socio-economic/

political role “as an active, almost animate participant in social life” (Kiaer 2005, 1). Or as another Constructivist philosopher, Boris Arvatov, put it: materiality and human practice should even be “connected like ‘coworkers’” (1997, 124), insisting that Socialist Man should shed himself of the dualist rupture between things and people, material and ideal, matter and spirit – all of them philosophically founded in bourgeois ideology of private property and commodity relations – and instead enter “into an active, creative contact with the world of Things” (Arvatov 1997, 123; cf. also Kiaer 2005, 30).

This argument mirrors some of the general ideas in Leon Trotsky’s essays, *The Problems of Everyday Life* first voiced in *Pravda* during the early 1920s. According to Trotsky – who was, of course, even less focussed on the role of art in particular – “the new generation is destined to learn [communism] in the elements of construction, the elements of construction of everyday life” (Trotsky 1973 [1924], 70). Here, the site of both struggle and the measure of the (success of the) Revolution is the everyday and the active (re)construction of its materiality, as one might frame it to get a grasp of the further trajectory this line of thought subsequently was to have into the theories and practices of for instance architecture (especially through the traditions of VKhUTEMAS and Bauhaus), as well as into recent notions of the digital and remixing the archive/database and hence perhaps even the whole present entanglement of on/offline-reality, which is, of course, both the theme of Bard’s remake and its structural condition.

Although Devin Fore certainly overstates the point when insisting on making Vertov (and his cinematic project) the sole protagonist of this kind of Constructivist materialism, he still makes a valid point when he claims that it is: “the work of the Soviet documentarian Dziga Vertov that takes us beyond a long-established conception of the political as something coextensive with the faculty of language itself (‘political consciousness is perhaps nonexistent outside of the logos,’ writes Roland Barthes), and relocates the site of political activity and agency instead within modern processes of technical making. For Vertov, politics emerges out of matter rather than discourse” (Fore 2010, 369).

Besides its parallels to Bruno Latour’s notion of a more object-oriented *Dingpolitik,* a “parliament of things“ (2005), this concept of a “politics of matter” is quite interesting also on a more historical note. If we accept this lineage dating back to Constructivism and its particular kind of materialism (“factography”), which could certainly seem to be a “secret passenger” of both Manovich’s and thus subsequently also Bard’s conceptual framework, there are also some interesting parallels between then and now on the micro-ontological levels, as we might call them in lack of better words. Here we are particularly referring to what has now become known as the digitality of the computer (and perhaps also its culture in more general terms (Gere 2008, 16). In fact, the trajectory leading to the language and operations of new media could perhaps also be traced back to Aleksandr Bogdanov's proto-cybernetic, perhaps even proto-digital[7] meta-science "tektology." This "universal organizational science" (Bogdanov 2003, 30) was developed in the years preceding the Russian Revolution and subsequently adopted and developed further by some of the main advocates of Constructivism and Productivism as well as a central figure of the legendary Constructivist journal *Novyi LEF*, Sergei Tretjakov (Fore 2006a). Bogdanov's work, which he himself described as a "uniquely holistic and uniquely monistic understanding of the Universe" (Bogdanov 2003, 4), had as its crucial tenet that all of material and social reality was structured in analogous ways (today we would say that "all is digital"), thus leaving it all open to the manipulative operations of a so-called "monistic culture of organized production," which would include all kinds of productive practice ranging "from literacy to electrification, from romantic love to eugenics, from poetry to technical standardization" (Bogdanov quoted in Fore 2006a, 12). According to Bogdanov, Man thus "has no task and no activity, other than the organization" of the materials of technological, social, and cultural reality, since "we, people, are organizers of nature, of ourselves, and of our experience; [...] our practice, cognition and creativity" (Bogdanov 2003, 3). Shedding – by the interventions of new materialist theory – Bogdanov's still somewhat anthropocentric conception of organizing the world, the World of Man comes to be perceived as a place than can be re-mixed, for instance by using (or collaborating with) different material technologies.

From Passive Audiences to (Digital) Co-Producers

Following the advent of digital media and more specifically online video-sharing websites, collective creation, and (re)structuring of the database has become increasingly important in the production and theoretical conceptualization of contemporary cinema and film culture in general. It goes without saying that this is by no means irrelevant to Bard's project; especially given the fact that it is this specific trajectory – exemplified by Vertov read by and through Manovich

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[7] Charlie Gere (2008) has proposed the notion of digital culture as a cultural logic based on discrete elements that actually precedes digital technology/media, but makes no mention of Bogdanov's "tektology." Perhaps he should have.

– that has served as Bard's key inspiration, which makes it plausible to perceive Bard's project as an attempt to translate and reframe Vertov's project within a new media ecology.

Yet, as already argued, it is not just Vertov's particular project that is actualized in Bard's remake. Bard's work also seems to invoke or actualize – although not quite as explicitly as the reference to Vertov – a number of more general, socio-structural, and socio-economic aspirations of some of Vertov's contemporaries among the Russian Constructivists, especially the so-called Productivists' ambition of an overall transformation of the process of work, and in extension of this turning the ordinary citizen-workers into creative co-producers (Bann 1974, Andrews and Kalinovska 1975, Lodder 1983, Gough 2005). However, this is not, as imagined *then*, achieved simply by declaring "uncompromising war on art" (Gan 1974 [1922], 37) and moving "from the easel to the machine" (Tarabukin 1923) or "into production" (Brik 1974 [1923]), hereby turning *factories* into "instruments of collective creativity" (Gough 2005, 155), but rather through the use of the 'superlative objects' (Barthes 1972, 88) of *our* contemporary society, namely: new digital media 'technologies of creative cooperation' (Saveri, Rheingold and Vian 2005) at the heart of the 'convergence culture' (Jenkins 2006) of Web 2.0.

Although this trajectory is not part of Bard's explicit reference to Manovich's reading of Vertov (from *The Language of New Media*), it does, however, inadvertently(?) echo the main tenets of Manovich's seminal essay "Avant-Garde as Software" (1999) and especially his recent book *Software Takes Command* (2013), which to a much higher degree takes on the socio-political dimensions of new digital media as the (supposed) realization of the societal aspirations of Russian avant-garde movements as well. As its title, *The Language of New Media*, also suggests, Manovich's book on cinema – in explicit contrast to the focus on sociological, economic, and political dimensions in other contemporary studies (cf. 2001, 12) – almost singularly focussed on the language-aspects of new media.

In this sense, Manovich's way of looking at the relationship between different media like cinema/film and digital media in *The Language of New Media* almost exclusively adheres to the 'media grammar literacy' (or 'media as language'-metaphor) described by Joshua Meyrowitz in his essay on what kind of 'media literacies' we use (or metaphors we apply), when we conceptualize our objects of study within media studies (Meyrowitz 1998, 99–103). To a large extent, this is also the kind of literacy that has prevailed in the reception history of Vertov as an auteur primarily experimenting with the formal language of cinema (for instance with reference to his intention of creating an 'Absolute Kinography').

In contrast, the essence of Bard's project can best be grasped if we make a shift in perspective (or applied 'media literacy') towards the notion of media as 'setting or environment,' in which the focus – in extension of how media is analyzed in Marshall McLuhan's 'medium theory' – is primarily on "how the nature of the medium shapes key aspects of the communication on both the micro-, single-situation level and on the macro-, societal level" (Meyrowitz 1998, 103).[8] When thinking in terms of 'medium literacy,' as Meyrowitz simply refers to it, the social, communicative setting is thus regarded as something that is "fostered by a medium" (Meyrowitz 1998, 106). It is in extension of this line of thought (or literacy) we should thus see Bard's project as principally focussed on what kinds of communicative human interactions new digital media foster or afford, what kind of socio-structural shifts occur, etc.; for instance in relation to previously much criticized passive media consumption *versus* so-called produsage (Bruns 2008), where co-producers actively and creatively participate in the digital remix culture and where amateurs increasingly outperform professionals (Manovich 2013). Here, the remix has become default, in contrast to previously (cf. Barthes 1977, Eco 1989, etc.) where remixing, quoting, and so on was an aesthetic option among other options. Now, remix has become an overarching metaphor for a number of media-related, but not necessarily media-specific operations, which the person formerly known as the passive recipient of mass media content did not possess the means to achieve.

In this, we once again encounter an (implicit?) legacy from Benjamin's writings. In his short essay, *The Newspaper*, Walter Benjamin emphasised that in the Soviet Russian Press of his time "the indiscriminate assimilation of facts goes [hand in hand with] the equally indiscriminate assimilation of readers, who are instantly elevated to the level of collaborators. […] The reader is at all times ready to become a writer" (Benjamin 2008c, 359). In the same vein Benjamin (with reference to Tretjakov) "distinguishes the operating writer from the informing writer. His mission is not to report but to struggle; not to play the spectator but to intervene actively" (2008b, 81). And the techno-social transformation required in order to achieve this would be what Bertolt Brecht referred to as the 'functional transformation' [*Umfunktionierung*] of "the forms and instruments of production," which would be the equivalent of "freeing the means of production and serving the class struggle" (Benjamin 2008b, 85).

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[8] According to Meyrowitz, analysis of media in this perspective "also involves consideration of how political, economic, and social forces encourage the development of some media over others [as well as] why particular forms of various media evolved" (1998, 106).

This prognosticated transition points towards the contemporarily often hailed transformation of the passive masses of the audience (of cinema, literature, theatre etc.) into active, creative co-producers, that could – like in the case of Bard's project – become part of the crowdsourced masses contributing to "cinema made by all" (Feldman 2010). The contemporary equivalence to Benjamin's vision of the progressive media politics of Soviet Russia is in other words astoundingly akin to the participatory, co-creative, remix/convergence culture so often heralded the last decade, in which the audience or the consumer becomes the creative co-producer, the prosumer, and so on, all facilitated by the personal computer as a tool of individual (co-)creative freedom. In this sense, Bard's project does, in Manovich's terminology, quite perfectly fit the cultural logic of new media: especially on account of its multi-authorial and meta-media characteristics. Or perhaps, one could argue, it fits the logic of new media a bit too well?

Documentary Turn: from Documented Life to Documentation of the Medium

Bard's project can be seen as a democratization of cultural production in quite a literal sense. But it is also – firstly and initially, one might say – conditioned by the kind of "semiotic democracy" John Fiske once pointed out (1987, 235). Bard's project is dependent on different users'/co-producers' individual interpretations of a cinematic work of art, which on the one hand has had a rather narrow or "fixed" reception history, but which on the other hand stands out as a quite enigmatic, "open" work. By this we are referring to the fact that in Bard's project it is very much the user's reinterpretation of each scene that comprises the film. If we take a look at the aesthetic approach that defines the work, it balances between experimental examination and what could be critically termed a *cyber-enthusiastic play* with Vertov's 1929 constellation of documented life. That is, a collective homage to the work of a visionary director made possible through net-based collaboration.

It should also be noted that the type of exchange taking place in *Man With a Movie Camera – The Global Remake* is comparable with a juried exhibition: different contributors might be uploading the material, but ultimately it is Perry Bard who functions as the facilitator and author of the footage that is featured. When she first envisioned the project, the idea was to produce a multi-authorial version of the historical *city symphony* film genre that Vertov's work is part of. Selected artists and filmmakers were to create their personal remakes of the film based in the cities they live in. Bard soon changed this to a concept, which encompassed a broader and less control-oriented understanding of the net-based participatory film. Now she made it possible for everyone interested in the project to contribute with their own versions of the specific scenes from Vertov's original. This procedure of cutting up the film and outsourcing its separate sequences did confront Bard with a number of considerations and a difficult decision: "When I logged the movie, I got to know it very well and I got very attached to a lot of shots and scenes. So, every time I got an upload I had a very strong feeling about whether it made sense or not. I realised I had too many expectations. I had to let go in order to allow other people to participate. Letting go proved to be very difficult. This is where a participatory project can fail; if you control it too much it can't be interesting to others. I realised that what I had achieved with this, but also previous projects, is to create a platform for participation and then the participation has to be individual. There is a structure within which one can participate but if I were to control it beyond that, I would be asking for an exact remake" (Alifragkis and Bard 2008, 157). Following this, one could argue, that she almost does the direct opposite of Vertov – she activates all the cameras out there, instead of making the camera "activate" the world. This is partly due to the fact that *The Global Remake* is not primarily about the direct indexical relationship between documented reality and the camera, but rather about the relationship between men, women, and their cameras and the digital film culture facilitated through user-interfaces, coded algorithms, and so on.

Because what characterizes most of the new material is a formalistic affinity with the sequences that made up the original film and functions as a kind of prefigured template. Most of the contributors tend to repeat the thematic content of each clip with an updated version of the specific settings and a camera angle which mimics or comments Vertov's compositions (Feldman 2010). Tripod cameras are transformed into mobile phones; trolleys traversing the city are replaced with cars and so on. This places Bard's project halfway between the video-archive and the documentary film. Images that seemed like a modern day revelation in Vertov's frame of reference are now – to put it bluntly – translated into everyday recordings of contemporary life, often with crude, poorly-composed, or random snapshots as the result [Fig. 11]. This makes the experience comparable with Thomas Elsaesser description of traversing the YouTube database: a tightrope walk between epiphany and entropy (Elsaesser 2008, 30). In this case a question of spotting the inventive or exciting moment in the reinterpretations of Vertov's scenes, while enduring a majority of formulaic clips showcasing the visual stereotypes of mobile digital media.

In this sense, it is not without consequence – especially on the aesthetic level – that the aim of Bard's art project seems less an attempt to forge a cinematic artwork in its own right, let alone a whole new visual language, than an attempt to orchestrate – or perhaps merely demonstrate? – the new social organization of the production of art under the banners of "remix," "participation," "social production," "collaborative creativity," and so on. This is, in fact, also recognized by Bard herself, when answering whether the remake will ever be screened alone, she replies that the "remake with the film looks like an experiment. The remake by itself looks like a very bad independent film. [...] People from the film world want all of the formal sophistication that Vertov put into his movie. That will never happen…" (Alifragkis and Bard 2008, 158). Instead, she insists that the project should be perceived – and judged – not as a film, but as an exploration of the digital community.

If Bard's project – as suggested by Feldman – can be perceived as a realisation of Vertov's plan for making cinema by the assistance of an army of kinoks, which was never realised by Vertov himself, but which on a technological level has now become much more feasible, it is at the same time a realisation that is not quite what Vertov might have expected. In Vertov's view, this army of kinoks, who "would make, edit, distribute and exhibit film in a continuous stream" (Feldman 2010, 2), were certainly intended to be trained and skilled in the art of capturing reality on film, on par with himself, film editor and future wife Elisaveta Svilova and his younger brother and cameraman Michael Kaufman. The kinoks actually consisted of young, ambitious cameramen, editors, technicians, and animators. Vertov, Kaufman, and Svivola functioned as the organising counsel for this larger group, "the higher organ of the *kinoks*" (*visshii organ kinokov*), whose primary function was to act as the official spokespersons for the production policy of the cooperative. In a contemporary perspective, the organisation and articulation of the kinoks certainly has a militaristic ring, and Vertov himself also described the members as "an international movement that marched in step with the world proletarian revolution" (quoted by Drobashenko 1966, 81). In this context, this declaration is interesting, not so much because of how it was formulated, but more because of the global ambition bestowed upon the creation of this new documentary film language.[9] Bard's contemporary army of cameramen primarily equipped with various mobile gadgets, that technologically speaking makes it possible for anyone to participate in creation of cinema, generally seem to be untrained/unskilled amateurs, apparently often university students in media production classes ("kinoks with a fixed curriculum"). This definitely does not sit well with the idea that digitally facilitated collaborative amateur production within remix culture so often presented especially in the mid-2000s, for instance Lev Manovich own suggestion that amateur production within remix culture often seems to "represents the most innovative cultural production done today" from his 2008 online version of *Software Takes Command* (2013); a claim that has now – wisely – been elicited from the official version of the book.

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[9] Both Petric and Michelson calls attention to the fact that Vertov, Aleksei Gan, and Vladimir Mayakovsky where among the only soviet artists to explicitly express this cosmopolitan desire that were later to be deemed as treachery by the Communist Party.

The positioning of the work between avant-garde and aesthetic sensibilities represented by the participatory and film technical aspects, respectively, seems crucial for understanding the media historical impact and the function of the remake. Considering that although Vertov's movie – especially if you consult most of its paratext – seems preoccupied with the recording of life "as it is," one should not ignore, nor underestimate the aesthetic cinematic dimensions of this movie. It is certainly no *unfiltered* decoding of reality; the celebratory aesthetics of *The Man with the Movie Camera* goes way beyond experimentation with decoding and revelation alone. This is evident in direct comparison with the remake; which is an affordance, Bard's setup obviously facilitates quite well. What becomes clear is the degree to which the new, user-generated scenes are (1) less aesthetically challenging than those of Vertov (that is: less visually composed, less genuinely experimental, less innovative, and so on); and (2) in many ways, more preoccupied with establishing a technologically-dictated "aesthetics of recording reality" than actually happens to be the case with Vertov. This is mainly due to the frequent use of and explicit reference to mobile recording devices in combination with the just mentioned "sloppy" aesthetic, which – when adding to the mix the already dominating conventions concerning mobile media-recording – produces an unmistakable realism effect. This means that when looking at Bard's remake, we come to realise, what we are actually looking at is a reality effect-driven reenactment of what now stands out as a documentary that is much more highly aestheticised than it pretends to be (as proclaimed in Vertov's original opening manifesto) or is often made out to be. In the perspective of collaborative media-practice, it could be argued that while Vertov's original shows us the consequences of the enchantment of film, Bard's "contemporary kinoks" through their collective actions display the disenchantment of the very same medium. Two very different lessons that might be equally important to remember.

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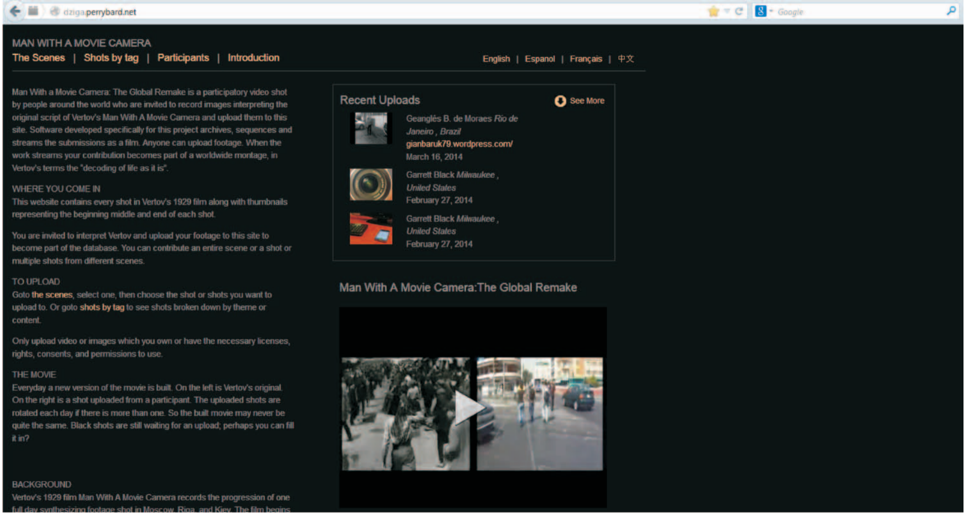
Figures 1–2. Examples of the interface in Perry Bard's *Man With a Movie Camera: The Global Remake.*



MAN WITH A MOVIE CAMERA
The Scenes | Shots by tag | Participants | Introduction
English | Espanol | Français | 中文

Man With a Movie Camera: The Global Remake is a participatory video shot by people around the world who are invited to record images interpreting the original script of Vertov's Man With A Movie Camera and upload them to this site. Software developed specifically for this project archives, sequences and streams the submissions as a film. Anyone can upload footage. When the work streams your contribution becomes part of a worldwide montage, in Vertov's terms the "decoding of life as it is".

WHERE YOU COME IN
This website contains every shot in Vertov's 1929 film along with thumbnails representing the beginning middle and end of each shot.

You are invited to interpret Vertov and upload your footage to this site to become part of the database. You can contribute an entire scene or a shot or multiple shots from different scenes.

TO UPLOAD
Goto the scenes, select one, then choose the shot or shots you want to upload to. Or goto shots by tag to see shots broken down by theme or content.

Only upload video or images which you own or have the necessary licenses, rights, consents, and permissions to use.

THE MOVIE
Everyday a new version of the movie is built. On the left is Vertov's original. On the right is a shot uploaded from a participant. The uploaded shots are rotated each day if there is more than one. So the built movie may never be quite the same. Black shots are still waiting for an upload; perhaps you can fill it in?

BACKGROUND
Vertov's 1929 film Man With A Movie Camera records the progression of one full day synthesizing footage shot in Moscow, Riga, and Kiev. The film begins

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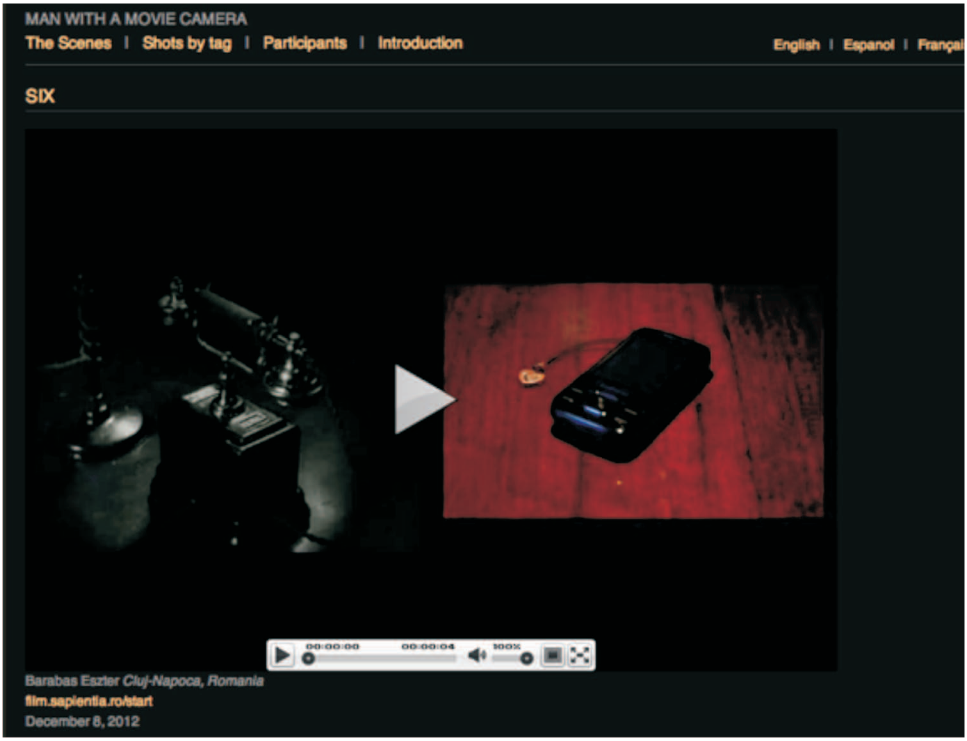
February 27, 2014

Man With A Movie Camera:The Global Remake



MAN WITH A MOVIE CAMERA
The Scenes | Shots by tag | Participants | Introduction
English | Espanol | Françai

SIX

Barabas Eszter *Cluj-Napoca, Romania*
film.sapientia.ro/start
December 8, 2012

Figures 3–4. Visual outtakes from the highly accelerated montage in the end sequence of Vertov's film.

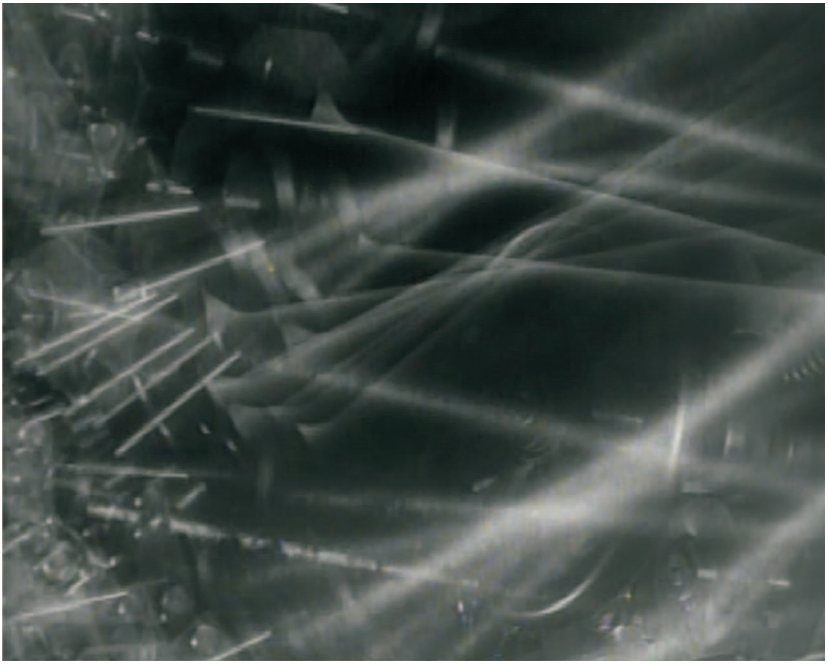
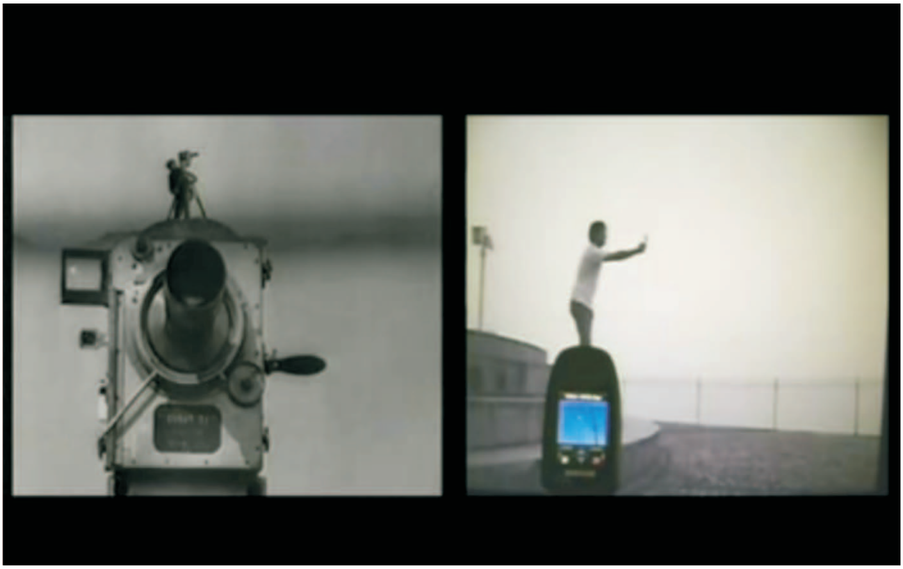
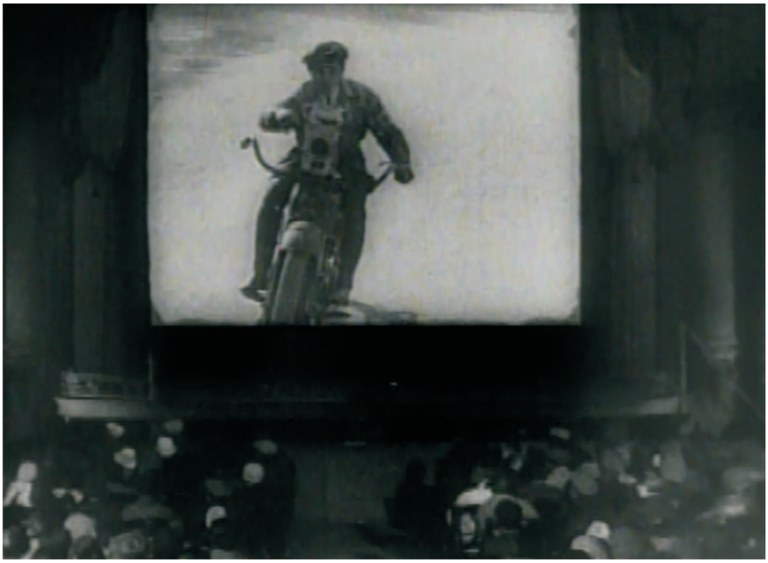


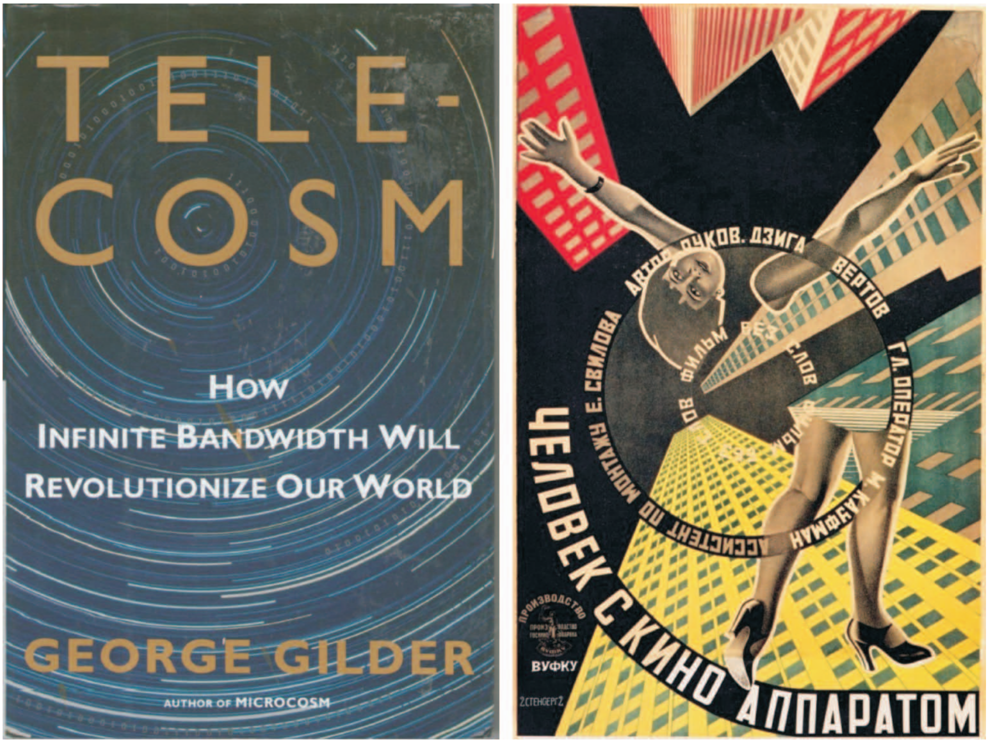
Figure 5. Example of the ubiquitous presence of mobile phone as camera in Bard's remake.



Figures 6–7. Vertov's brother and fellow *kinok* Mikhail Kaufman performing daring stunts simultaneously in front and behind the camera in the role of *The Man with the Movie Camera*.



Figures 8–9. The cover of Gilder’s book and the original film poster by the Stenberg brothers.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HOW
INFINITE BANDWIDTH WILL
REVOLUTIONIZE OUR WORLD
GEORGE GILDER
AUTHOR OF MICROCOSM
АВТОР-РУКОВ. ДЗИГА ВЕРТОВ
Г.Л. ОПЕРАТОР М. КАУФМАН
АССИСТЕНТ ПО МОНТАЖУ Е. СВИЛОВА
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Figure 10. The iconic closing shot of Vertov's film that superimposes the human eye with the camera lens.

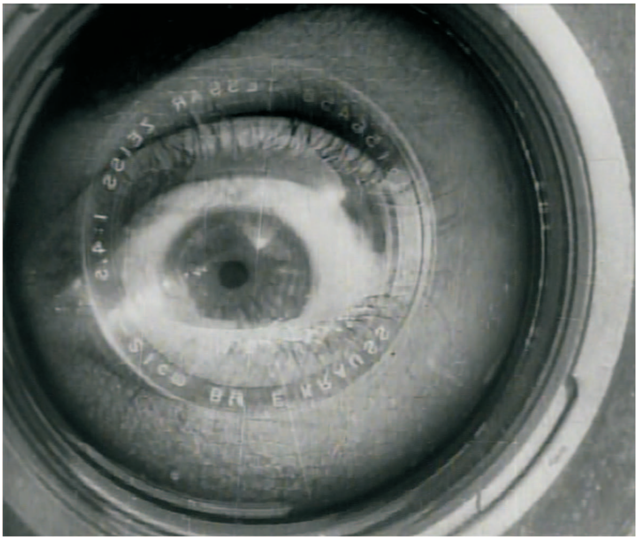
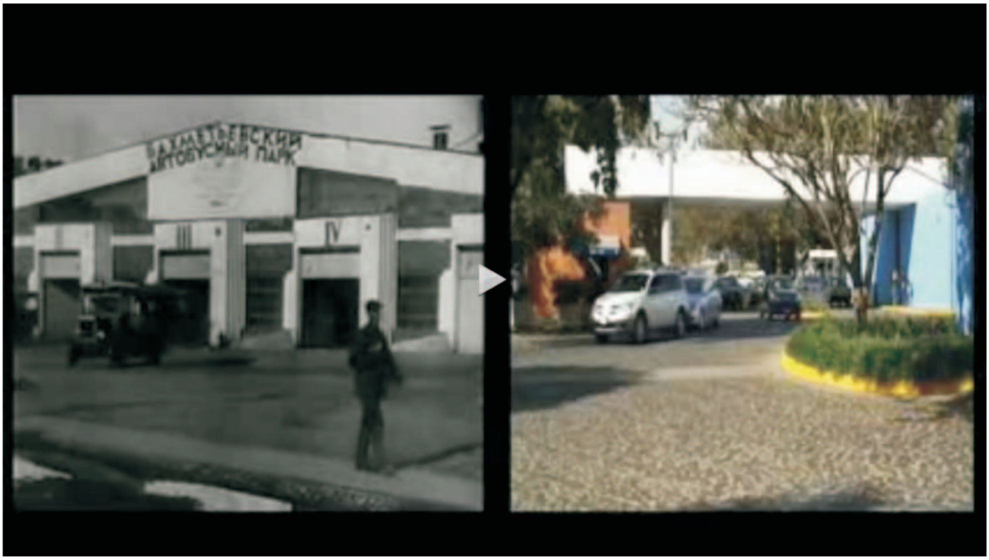


Figure 11. One example of the straightforward "image translations" that takes place in many of the uploaded videos, which comprises Bard's remake.


БАХМЕТЬЕВСКИЙ
АВТОБУСНЫЙ ПАРК

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Random Access Montage. How Online Access Has Changed Amateur Video Editing

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Abstract. Digital technology has often been discussed in relation to how it changed either the production or the reception of audiovisual cultures. This paper will consider a combination of both as a crucial part in understanding strategies of inter- and transmedial amateur creativity. Based on an experimental ethnography of the online video subgenre/ subculture "YouTubePoop," the paper will elaborate on the connection between the individual experience and the creation of digital media. The loose collective of independent amateurs behind the YouTubePoop videos makes use of already existing audiovisual material ranging from television shows to videos of other YouTube users. The re-created remixes and mash-ups are characterized by their random selection of original material and their nonsensical humour. Hence, the rapid montage of this heterogeneous content is just as much part of the intensified aesthetic expressiveness as are the applied special effects available in the digital video editing software. Both aspects highlight the strong interdependence of the rapid accessibility of online content and digital technology and the new aesthetic expressions they are fostering. The paper will show how the experience and navigation of digital interfaces (editing software, media players, or homepages) affect the design and practice of these video-remixes. This will open the discussion about intertextual strategies of media appropriation to an aesthetic and praxeological analysis of media interaction.

Keywords: Amateur culture, montage and video editing, online video, YouTubePoop, software studies.

How Does Digital Technology Affect Cultural Production?

Intermediality is a central aesthetic feature of new media technologies. This article is based on a technological understanding of intermediality as an active fusion of diverse media dispositives and diverse media content. Over the last two decades, the remixing of visual and audiovisual content developed from a time-consuming, mainly artistic practice to a source of popular entertainment for those remixing and for those watching and sharing these videos on online video platforms. The increasing digitization of audiovisual entertainment and the ongoing technological improvement in the processing of audiovisual content were keys to this development. This shift towards the digital is accompanied by an even more effective shift from offline content to online content – from hard drives to clouds, from DVDs to Netflix. Particularly with regard to new modes of cultural production, online "art platforms" (Goriunova 2012) like YouTube served on one side as extensive collections of original videos from other media (television, cinema, etc.) and on the other side as a public display of their appropriation by variably professionalized users. Due to its easily circumvented copyright protection, YouTube has facilitated both the uploading of user-generated content and – more importantly – the acquisition of audiovisual content by means of free third-party software. But how can we theoretically and empirically link these technological shifts to the new aesthetics and new modes of production that they enabled?

The more areas of media culture are affected by digitization, the more digitality – not to mention virtuality – proves to be an insufficient concept to grasp particular aesthetic changes. Victoria Vesna offers a heuristic model to approach this challenge. The "database aesthetics" (Vesna 2007) serves her as a metaphorical concept to understand the ways in which big amounts of data relate to their visual representation. Instead of focusing on the visualization of quantitative big data, I argue that the notion of the database and its effects on aesthetics need to be taken particularly seriously when dealing with non-quantifiable audiovisual content and its re-arrangement. So we need to ask how the aesthetics of audiovisual content changes once it is part of a digital database. This can either be the case when a video file is stored in the folder structure of a hard drive or when a video is embedded in the graphic user interface of streaming platforms or of editing software. Ultimately, applying the database paradigm to online videos allows us to grasp the aesthetic relation between different technological elements (storage, display, transmission) and the user's constant and random access to them that shapes the emerging digital culture.

This takes us back to Lev Manovich's attempts at defining the language of new media for which he suggested five different features: numeric representation of information in binary code, modularity of data access, automation of multiple steps of procedure, variability, transcoding (Manovich 2002, 49). In particular, the process of "transcoding" is crucial to answer the question of how digital technology has affected and still affects cultural production. Manovich describes transcoding as a translational process from a "computer layer" to a "cultural layer." "That is, we may expect that the computer layer will affect the cultural layer. The ways in which computer models the world, represents data and allows us to operate on it; the key operations behind all computer programs (such as search, match, sort, filter); the conventions of HCI – in short, what can be called computer's ontology, epistemology and pragmatics – influence the cultural layer of new media: its organization, its emerging genres, its contents" (Manovich 2002, 64).

The implications of this transcoding can be seen in different degrees of complexity. A simple example of how the database aesthetics enforces itself onto the visual surface of an online video can be found in many popular YouTube videos. Since the media platform functions as a competitive and increasingly commercially oriented space, every subscription and every view count for the producer's popularity – and for Google's advertisement plan. The technological solution for this hunt for subscribing YouTube users is simple: below every online video there is a small "subscribe" button. So it is striking to see how this "computer layer" surrounding the video is transposed to the "cultural layer" of the video itself. In the same way as this "subscribe" button is included in some videos [Fig. 1], other videos tend to use split screen windows to refer to other videos by the same user.

Certainly, there are more complex examples of how the design of videos is affected by the "computer layer." One such fundamental transcoding process is the effect digitization has on the quality of online videos, namely their resolution, duration, and complexity. Of course, this downside of digitization has continuously disappeared with the arrival of new high-resolution video formats. A quantitative account of the evolving online moving image formats will give better insights into this shift in the capacity of image processing and in the average download rate [Fig. 2].[1] If we have a look at the drastic increase of downloadable Megabytes per second and the equivalent increase in RAM (Random Access Memory) we have to acknowledge that these two factors have fundamentally altered the possibilities of audiovisual appropriation: on one side the availability of source material and its easy accessibility; on the other side the internal working memory of computers that allow us not only to display these digital videos but also modify them more and more fluently. In order to give an impression of what this tentative and – taking the immensely varying download rate from country to country into account – manipulative diagram means for the complexity of a digital visual culture it needs to be related to some milestones on the way to YouTube now, in 2014: it was not until 1994 that you could display a looping GIF on the Netscape Explorer. In 1996, Macromedia's Flash Editor revolutionized the possibilities of digital amateur animation and its web-wide spread by means of the .swf format. In 2002, Macromedia had already been bought by Adobe and Adobe Flash Player 6 at last supported the playback of converted videos on any imaginable homepage. It was this easy-to-handle format that eventually led to the raise and success of YouTube as a central platform for sharing videos. And if we make yet another jump to the year 2013 when we're smoothly streaming YouTube videos in High Definition, it is hard to ignore that some things have changed fundamentally in professional and amateur media practice. However plausible this diagram may look, it does not tell more than the fact that technological change did have an effect on cultural production. To find out more about these aspects we have to dig deeper into what Manovich called the "computer's pragmatics."

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[1] The diagrams are based on Moore's Law for the prediction of computer capability (60% annual growth) and Nielsen's Law for the prediction of internet bandwidth (50% annual growth), and balanced by empirical updates by Nielsen 1998 and McCallum 2013.

A third example of how technological change affects cultural production is the main object of investigation that I called "Random Access Montage" in the title of this article. The rapid increase of both computer capacities and the internet bandwidth over the last years indeed allowed for a new style of video editing. It can be characterized by a high degree of improvisation and the seemingly endless resources of audiovisual material available to the amateur editor. The remix genre of YouTubePoop videos serves as a great example for this.

Randomizing Participatory Culture: the Case of YouTubePoop

Despite their vulgarizing self-description, YouTubePoop videos (in the following YTPs) can be described as a really traditional kind of popular appropriation of culture. Whereas John Fiske described the obscene mocking of commercial songs as a kind of empowerment within cultural hierarchies (Fiske 2011, 318), these plays on words are nowadays accompanied or entirely replaced by intense ludic interactions with audiovisual content. These interactions manifest themselves in an expressive and crude aesthetics of the resulting videos that mark the core characteristics of the genre: the rapid editing, the heterogeneous imagery, and a sense of humor that is varying from scatology to absurdism. The creators of YouTubePoops (in the following YTPers) often disrupt not only the structure of sentences but also the visual surface of the source material by means of rapid and random editing and the extensive use of special effects. This aggressive nature of YTP repeatedly caused an outrage by other YouTube users who were trying to ban YTP videos completely from the online platform or at least express their own repulsion. Reactions like this usually resulted in a euphoric counter movement by the YouTubePoop community who starts to remix those very reactions.

It is this combination of high-level media literacy and the smack of counter culture that make this genre so appealing for scholars of the humanities and the studies of popular culture. This cultural bias in the academic discussion of hybrid media aesthetics is best illustrated by an important incident within the American YTP community. When the American literature scholar David Bailey addressed all YTPers in 2010 by means of a short lecture series on YouTube the academic interest in intermediality (Eugster 2015) and the popular interest in intermediality as a kind of technological appropriation clashed. His main interest in YTP videos was their high linguistic and visual complexity that point to a high degree of media literacy. In his video lecture, he refers to two different dimensions of media literacy: on one side he is talking about the technological literacy in the handling of video editing software; on the other side he is talking about a cultural literacy, which he ascribes to the complex re-arrangement of narratives in those videos. To explain the cultural relevance of literacy he goes back to the role of vernacular language in medieval Christianity and to the experimental nature of T. S. Eliot's *Wasteland*. In one comment to his video lecture "Remix Culture and the History of Art," a user expresses his irritation about this parallelization of contemporary media practices with the history of art and culture: "It's really not anything special, it's just basic audio and video editing. There is NOTHING about it that has to do with 'literature' or 'religion' or any mass amount of education to make. It's a hobby no deeper meaning, it's just a bunch of stupid video's a bunch of teenager's make with pirated software, and seriously it's not like we read books or anything. I don't think this is going to go anywhere, especially in the direction you're putting it. It really doesn't make sense to me" (Bailey 2010).

The emphasis on the randomness of this digital phenomenon is striking. It seems to be the very absence of any "deeper meaning" that makes the practice of random access montage so attractive. In a similar discussion on a German-speaking community forum, a user brings his motivation for the editing of videos down to three reasons: "I am doing poops resp. videos simply because I am bored, because I want to cram a stupid idea (or my dreams) into a video or because I want to irritate other YouTube users. Who needs all this meta-crap?" (YouTubeKacke.de 2011.) All modes of motivation refer to an immense spontaneity and ephemerality that mark the production of the videos. But how does this influence the way original videos are selected and the ways they are being edited by amateur users?

In the research for my master's thesis, I was conducting non-standardized vide interviews with four different Swiss YouTube users (vV0rtex, timmy41, fettesco, ZitronenSindSauer) who all engaged in YTP in one form or another. All of them ascribed the initial motivation for creating a YTP to a tiny peculiarity of an online video that they were watching by chance. Fettesco referred the somehow odd gesture of a TV show host to illustrate how such a peculiarity made him want to remix the video. On a more general level, vV0rtex described the selection of source material and applied effects: "You know that you like this material. But then you start thinking: how about adding this other clip to it or how about adding that effect to it?" Both responses show how the quick access to audiovisual content online functions as a catalyst or enabler for users' creative engagement. But this is only the beginning of a complex process behind most videos. A major part of the editing is decided by the wide variety of improvisations that are made possible by digital video editing.

What Happened on the Eve of YouTube?

In his contribution to Joshua Green's and Jean Burgess's *YouTube: Online Video and Participatory Culture*, Henry Jenkins refers to other forms of media participation that dominated the pre-digital popular culture to answer the question: what happened before YouTube? This historical account was essential to contain the often naive and blind enthusiasm about the Web 2.0 as an unprecedented media historical shift. However, it does not offer a lot of information about the practices and media historical/biographical continuities behind amateur production. In order to fully answer to this question, we might need to focus our attention on the genuinely digital media practices that directly preceded YouTube in the late 1990ies and early 2000s. For a full understanding of online videos and their implications for the future development of amateur cultures we need to rephrase the question and ask what happened right before the international breakthrough of YouTube. Instead of focusing on prior community based ways of media participation, I would argue that the decade before YouTube was central for users' continuous familiarization with database aesthetics. In general, this meant getting used to interfaces, interactions, and intermediality.

In the course of the conducted media ethnography, I arranged a meeting with the two most active users of my sample (vV0rtex and timmy41). During this participant observation they demonstrated all stages of editing such a video in front of their desktop computer. This allowed for new ways of talking about the aesthetics of remix videos and opened up new media historical contexts – from their own perspective. During the participant observation with timmy41 and vV0rtex, they referred to a kind of software tool that is typical for this familiarization. When they were watching a potential remix source together, timmy41 suddenly came up with the idea to add some random sounds to one particular scene. It was by far not the first suggestion of what they could do with the video; however, it was his particular association with an application that struck me: "Let's add some sounds – you know, like with that F1 soundboard tool." The program they were referring to was a simple tool from 2002 that allowed them to play any sound sample they wanted by pushing one of the keyboard's function buttons. This tool disassembles linear media content – like television quotes or computer game sounds – and literally modularizes the media content on a range from F1 to F12. Thereby, the linear media content of other media enters the realm of the database.

Thinking of zapping through television channels and flipping through collected magazines, this idea of modularity would miss the point if it was restricted to digital media and not regarded in its proper *inter*mediality. Uncovering this context of digital media was one of the main reasons for interviewing the users from a media biographical perspective. So I was not surprised when two different users mentioned similar television shows that highly relied on the playback of random clips of other TV stations as precursors of YouTube. Fettesco even assumed the video clips from the TV show "TV Total" to be the first online video he has ever seen on YouTube. Those short clips of approximately five seconds were all framed by a stylized screen and could be controlled by Stefan Raab – the host of the show – by simply pressing one of the buttons in front of him. At the latest from 2002, this control over a wide collection of funny clips was not restricted to Stefan Raab anymore. On the official homepage of the television station, a small application allowed every viewer of the show and user of the homepage to take Raab's place and replay the same video clips in Real Player at any time and in any order they wanted. The imitation of this modularized intermediality probably reached its peak with a Flash application that let any user replay sound samples by pushing the separate buttons on the interface. By mimicking the buttons on the the desk of the show's host [Fig. 3] it perfectly visualized the database structure of those modularized clips.

Another – user-generated – example puts even stronger emphasis on the database aesthetics of this random access to modularized content. In 2001, a

Swiss talk show on the topic of youth violence reached broad popularity among German-speaking teenagers. The famous sentences and short clips of the show spread through the Internet in the following months – and gained cult status in a way that a few years later would be referred to as “viral.” Due to the low internet connectivity, it was mostly small sound samples that spread like this. This restriction to short extracts and their diverse modes of digital embedding in homepages and small web applications may have even reinforced their popularity. One such program was created by a Zürich based class of application developers. The small Flash application that bears strong resemblance to the “TV Total Nippelboard” relied even more strictly on a grid of separate buttons that invited any interested user to freely combine the sound samples behind them [Fig. 4]. Programs like this relocated television’s linear stream of audiovisual content to a two-dimensional interface. This visual restructuring of audiovisual content marks another key shift towards a distinct language of new media: “Therefore, if cinema sampled time but still preserved its linear ordering (subsequent moments of time become subsequent frames), new media abandons this “human-centered” representation altogether – in order to put represented time fully under human control. Time is mapped onto two-dimensional space, where it can be managed, analyzed and manipulated more easily” (Manovich 2001, 67).

With reference to digital cinema, Manovich concludes that – despite all possibilities of random access – this has not led to a clear cultural preference of the database over the narrative. But what happens when we include the human interaction back into this allegedly non-human-centered representation? The given examples clearly contradict this continuous preference for the narrative and instead put popular database aesthetics into the centre of attention. If we apply this argument to the random access montage of YTPs, we get a clearer picture of what they are about. Instead of contrasting the linear original material, the remix videos seem to be adjusting to this tendency of modularization – and expose them as such.

There is a simple example to show how this seemingly non-human two-dimensional representation of audiovisual content is appropriated by human actors. Many YTP producers willingly understate the amount of work they put into a video – but at the same time they ascribe a central role to the process of editing. Many forum posts and videos on YouTube make this evident as they celebrate the YTPs in their making and show off with their complexity [Fig. 5]. This self-documentation of a media practice somewhat problematizes the notion that this two-dimensional mapping of a video abandons a “‘human-centered' representation." After all, it is not only the technological and structural background of a remix video that is represented via print screen of the graphic user interface that finds its way into public – but also the aesthetic experience of user's creative engagement. So basically we are dealing with the same database structure as in Fig. 3 and Fig. 4 although you cannot simply replay the separated clips but re-assemble and re-modularize them on different layers.

Figure 5 shows the editing plan of the YTP music video (YTPMV) "Dewey under a heavy dose of binaural beats" which has been taken down from YouTube for copyright infringement. Two characters from the sitcom *Malcolm in the Middle* have been cut out and are flipping horizontally against an abstract background. It is visible in the timeline of the project that the snippets of the video layer are coupled with the snippets of the audio layer. This fidelity to the original audio-visual content is crucial for the synesthetic effect of many YTPMVs. In the second interview, vV0rtex described this procedure as some kind of an auxiliary structure. According to him, the use of so called box visuals – a picture inside a picture – makes the remix of various sources more comprehensible to the viewer. Considering the abstract and non-narrative nature of those music videos, comprehensibility mainly relates to the structure and the 'workmanship' behind the video. This is very characteristic of this kind of community based digital "cinéma des copains" – the aesthetic idiosyncrasies that lead to the production of those videos are thus often the same that are at work during the reception and appreciation of the videos. This reciprocity of media production and reception cannot be understood without a closer look at the user's perspective.

New Media Praxeology: Tracking Traces of Media Navigation

Different users edit videos differently. This is one of the first things that became evident after half an hour of the participant observation of two YTP producers. When vV0rtex was editing a Swiss TV commercial that I suggested for editing, the first thing he did was to split the sentences into barely noticeable small snippets. He continued by copying and pasting them and varying the pitch of the audio of every single snippet in order to create some kind of stuttering melody. He exemplified that he has absolutely no idea of how the result will look or sound like because he was just editing along the shape of the audio layer. So in order to get to the desired result, he randomly edited the clip in the abstract two-dimensional space of the graphic user interface of the software. Interestingly, timmy41 hereon described his own working style in contrast to this abstract procedure. He has "to look at the video for about 10'000 times" before he dares to dissect a video. The juxtaposition of these two approaches to video editing comprises the latitude in which varying modes of improvisation, and varying dependence on technological determinacy define the aesthetic outcome.

In the collaborative editing of a different video, they showed me a third way of remixing a video. As they were not happy about the possibilities to distort the source video I suggested, they were looking for a more versatile source with more movement and less talking. They were brainstorming for ideas and browsing through the database of YouTube until they eventually found an episode of Mr. Bean that seemed like a useful source video to both of them. After watching through parts of it and considering it as a sufficiently funny and multifaceted source, they downloaded the video file by means of third-party software. It was not until they had imported the video to the video editing software that they were watching through the whole video from its beginning. It turned out that the editing software offered a much more complex navigation through the video than did the YouTube player. Every time Rowan Atkinson did a sweeping movement they reversed the motion in the preview window for one or two seconds by pushing a shortcut on the keyboard. With these kinds of instantaneous effects, they started to explore the whole clip by editing it. In the end, plenty of modifications have been made before they haven't even watched through the first half of the video. When I asked ZitronenSindSauer about this improvisational style of editing he described his way of editing as a mixture of both approaches: "Usually, I first listen and watch through the whole video before I start editing. But sometimes I also navigate through the video [moves back and forth with his fist] and then you can see where which effect would fit. Even if you speed up the video, you can find out what sounds funny with this procedure. It's a matter of trial and error – and listening closely."

This kind of navigation within the timeline is reminiscent of the scratching technique when vinyl records are moved back and forth. Similarly, there is a certain gap between this performative act of playing the video back and forth – during the explorative phase of editing – and the reversing effect that will eventually be added to the video. This tension between situational pleasure and the shaping of a certain editing style proves to be highly productive within the creation process. During the participant observation, it was very characteristic of this kind of improvisation that the decisions were made somewhere between comments like "We totally have to reverse this!" and moderating self-control as in "There must not be too much reversing…" Even the use of more complex effects is commented this way. When the stage magician in the Mr. Bean episode conjures up a pair of keys out of Mr. Bean's pocket, timmy41 comes up with the idea that they could replace the keys with Mr. Bean's body [Fig. 6]. The absurd iconography of this classic mise-en-abîme instantaneously reminds them of a befriended YTPer and they tell me that he would most certainly do something similar at this point of the video.

Naturally, this interdependence of commenting, discussing, and editing is largely conditioned by my presence as a researcher. The more they were helping each other and the more they started to refer to remix videos of other users, the more their own aesthetic demands came to the fore. The distinction between two different kinds of modifications prevailed through all the interviews and was affirmed in my own observations. The first kind of modifications is a combination of different basic editing features like cutting, colour balancing, super-impositions, and changes in playback speed that go from slow-motion distortions to reversing of single shots. The elaborate trick of Mr. Bean pulling himself out of his pocket would rather belong to this kind whereas the second kind of modification embraces a wide range of special effects that require more computational power than most basic editing tools. They are symptomatic for what Lev Manovich calls the automatization of digital media. Most of those distortions modify each frame of selected video clip according some customizable rules. The swirl effect [Fig. 7] is a good example for this since they added it to the video for the sole reason that "this effect was still missing."

The described style of editing can be understood as a clear trace of what Henry Jenkins describes as "the migratory behavior of media audiences who will go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experiences they want" (Jenkins 2006, 2). Isn't this randomization of content selection and the spontaneous modification the logical consequence of Geert Lovink's declaration that "we no longer watch films or TV; [but] we watch databases" (Lovink 2009, 9)? Instead of flipping through a collection of magazines or zapping through all the channels on television, we navigate through databases. One of the fundamental differences to those analogue practices, however, is that the implicit and explicit participation (Schäfer 2009, 16) on online platforms increase the publicity of such phenomena. Hence, the accustomed – almost naturalized – navigation through online and offline databases (computer layer) visibly and audibly influences the aesthetics of the videos in question (cultural layer) by the rapid changes from one visual attraction to another. Most of the interviewed users make no secret of the randomness and simplicity of most of their videos. After all, they are well aware that their editing is just a way to get most entertainment out of freely available content, pirated software, and their device's computational capacity.

So the intermediality we are dealing with in those videos is situated between technological possibilities and their individual appropriation. Both aspects define each another: on one hand there is not a single technology that does not envision its very use, and appropriation on the other hand is a complex process of independence and dependence, innovation and repetition that makes use of every aspect of technology for individual cultural production.

Moving Towards Designed Appropriation

In order to answer the opening question we need to make another step back in the history of digital amateur culture. How online access has changed amateur video editing depends largely on how amateur editors appropriated nonlinear digital video editing as a source of entertainment before YouTube. Considering that media convergence works on multiple levels, we obviously need to look back from two different angles: video remixing as convergence of different content and video remixing as convergence of different technologies.

In their case study, Erik Blankinship and Esara Pilapa developed and tested in the early 2000s a computer program called talkTV. This software offered its users a database of short clips of the TV series Star Trek and allows them to re-assemble the spoken lines to new narratives. The experimental outline of this research project is so intriguing because the probands were asked to report on their experience of editing the videos. Those results proved talkTV to be a stimulating experience beyond the smaller circle of Star Trek fans among the test subjects: “All the participants stated that they enjoyed their experiences. Commonalities between three participant’s responses highlight three aspects of the talkTV experience which participants found to be ‘fun.’ The technical possibilities facilitated by the software, the experience of actual editing process and the end product are all aspects of what made talkTV enjoyable” (Blankinship/Esara 2003, 260).

Providing easier access to otherwise technologically and legally restricted audiovisual content opened up the potential of digital video editing as a source of popular entertainment. And most strikingly, the pleasure about the actual result of such media practice is just one out of three aspects. Instead of focusing merely on the new possibilities of participation provided by the Web 2.0, we have to assume that the publishing of the final product is just the tip of the ice berg. Even though the loneliest YouTube channels with less than ten views could be interpreted as a defeat of web 2.0, we might just as well turn the table and enquire about the development in digital amateur cultures from a consumer’s perspective. If we look at the visions of amateur video cultures in the 1990ies, we can clearly see that the utopia of media self-empowerment was by far not the same as the web 2.0 illusion that amateurs could overcome the economically driven media system. In 1994, a trailer for the early digital video editing equipment Video Toaster 4000 promoted a vision of amateur cultures becoming independent of network television by creating one's own content and editing the content of others. The promotional video shows a set of TV screens floating by with a dialogue of two conspiratorial voices in the off: "In an average week, the networks bring you six made for TV movies – *Dull!* [...] Thirty five hours of infomercials – *Insane!* Forty four hours of soap opera – *Very dull!* [...] Now it's payback time. *What do you mean?* You see, there are only three of them. *You mean the networks?* Yes, the old style networks, and they are fading away. But there are thirty Million of us, every one of us with a camcorder and a VCR. But now we have got a new weapon against blablabla-vision. *What's the new weapon?* It's new software. It's new hardware. It's the next generation of the most successful video tool of all time. *A whole new Video Toaster?* It will be the end of bla bla bla television: The Video Toaster 4000" (Newtek 1994).

This emphatic annunciation of a new era of entertainment is followed by a rather random montage of all the new and exciting superimposition and transition effects that are enabled by the promoted software. So the central aspect that is enabled by this technology is a more vivid audiovisual culture that is clearly distinct from traditional mass media. Both examples – the Video Toaster 4000 as well as talkTV – bring tendencies to the fore that the developing computational and internet technologies enforced and reinforced over the years. This continuity is critical for an understanding of the ways in which amateur cultures will develop in the future. Despite the tendencies towards a homogenization of online content by the big digital players like Google and Facebook, there will always be an off-site amateur culture of editing and creating a culture of its own. The hype of web 2.0 as an emancipatory project – which gives everybody the possibility to be seen or heard – might be easily revoked, but the ways in which technology was facilitated over the past decades cannot be undone.

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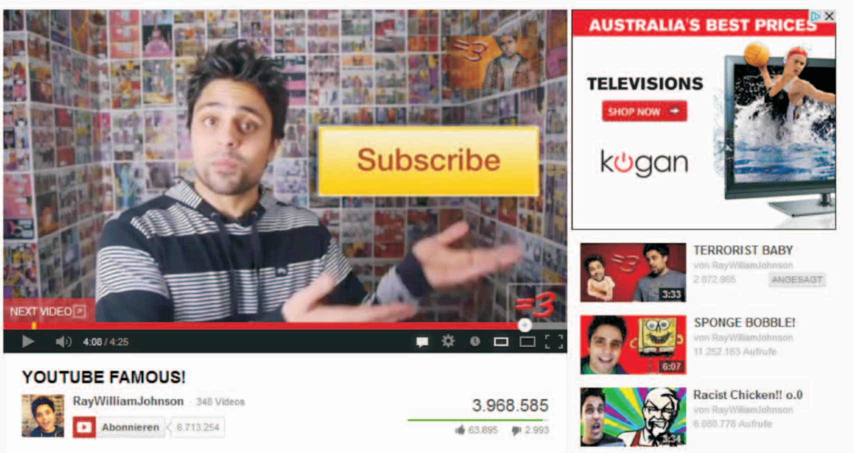
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3.968.585
63.895
2.993
TERRORIST BABY
von RayWilliamJohnson
2.872.965
ANGESAGT
3:33
SPONGE BOBBLE!
von RayWilliamJohnson
11.252.163 Aufrufe
6:07
Racist Chicken!! o.0
von RayWilliamJohnson
6.080.778 Aufrufe
3:34

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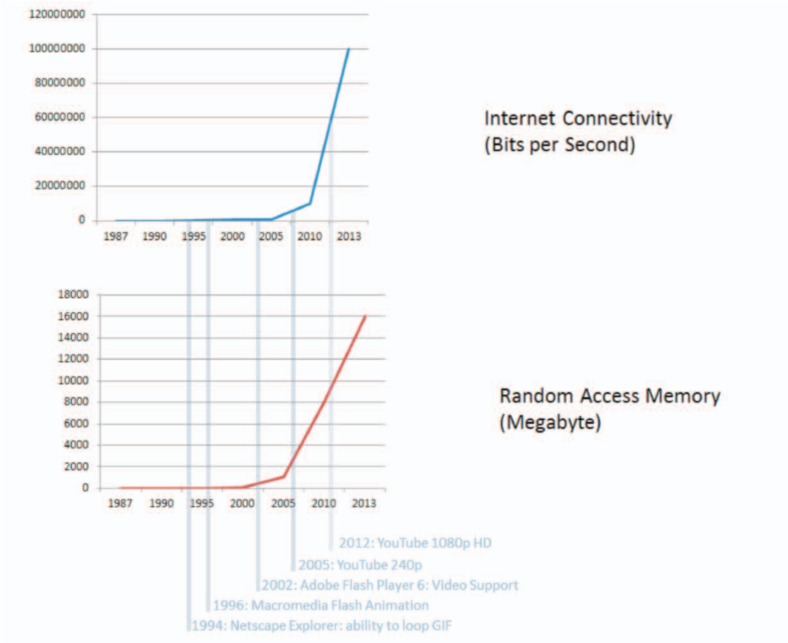

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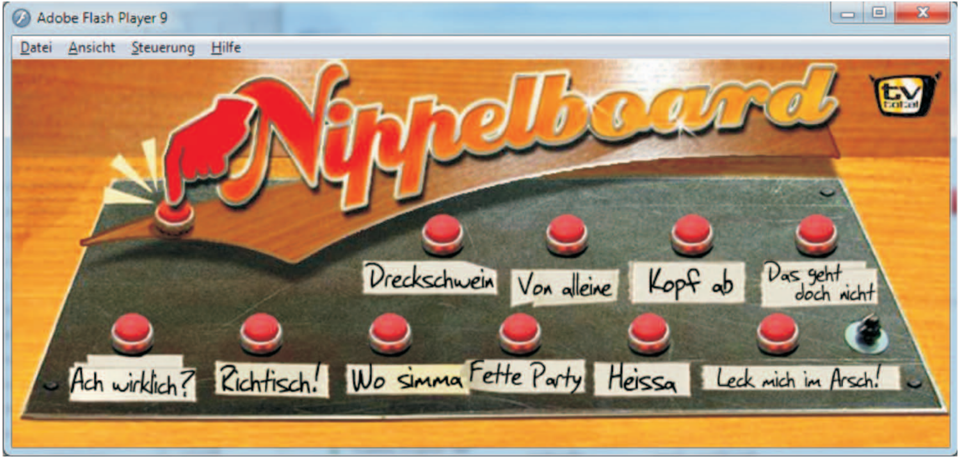
Adobe Flash Player 9
Datei Ansicht Steuerung Hilfe
Nippelboard
tv total
Dreckschwein
Von alleine
Kopf ab
Das geht doch nicht
Ach wirklich?
Richtisch!
Wo simma
Fette Party
Heissa
Leck mich im Arsch!

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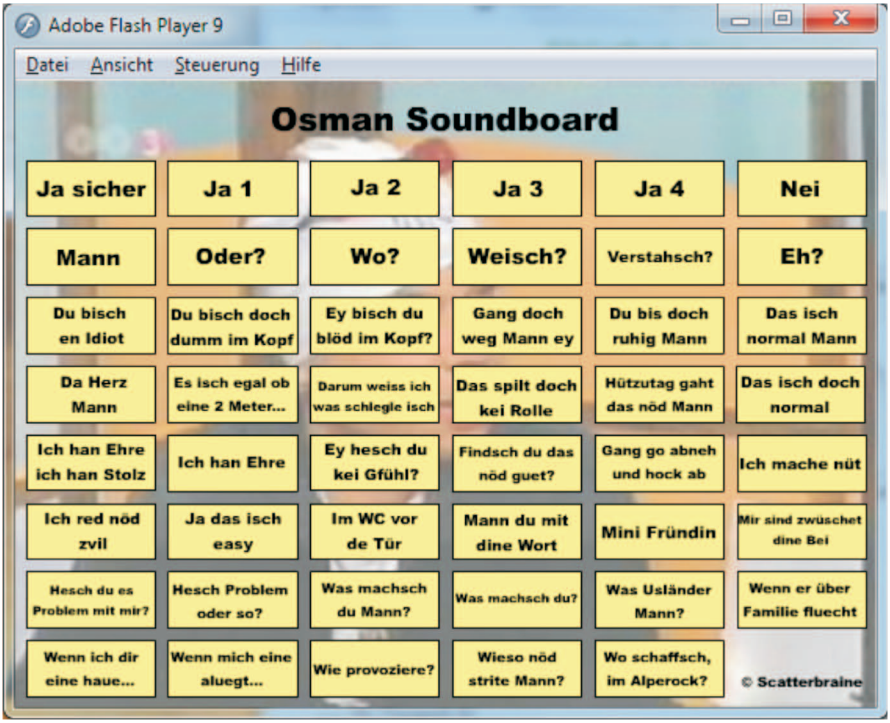
Adobe Flash Player 9
Datei Ansicht Steuerung Hilfe
Osman Soundboard
Ja sicher
Ja 1
Ja 2
Ja 3
Ja 4
Nei
Mann
Oder?
Wo?
Weisch?
Verstahsch?
Eh?
Du bisch en Idiot
Du bisch doch dumm im Kopf
Ey bisch du blöd im Kopf?
Gang doch weg Mann ey
Du bis doch ruhig Mann
Das isch normal Mann
Da Herz Mann
Es isch egal ob eine 2 Meter...
Darum weiss ich was schlegle isch
Das spilt doch kei Rolle
Hützutag gaht das nöd Mann
Das isch doch normal
Ich han Ehre ich han Stolz
Ich han Ehre
Ey hesch du kei Gfühl?
Findsch du das nöd guet?
Gang go abneh und hock ab
Ich mache nüt
Ich red nöd zvil
Ja das isch easy
Im WC vor de Tür
Mann du mit dine Wort
Mini Fründin
Mir sind zwüschet dine Bei
Hesch du es Problem mit mir?
Hesch Problem oder so?
Was machsch du Mann?
Was machsch du?
Was Usländer Mann?
Wenn er über Familie fluecht
Wenn ich dir eine haue...
Wenn mich eine aluegt...
Wie provoziere?
Wieso nöd strite Mann?
Wo schaffsch, im Alperock?
© Scatterbraine

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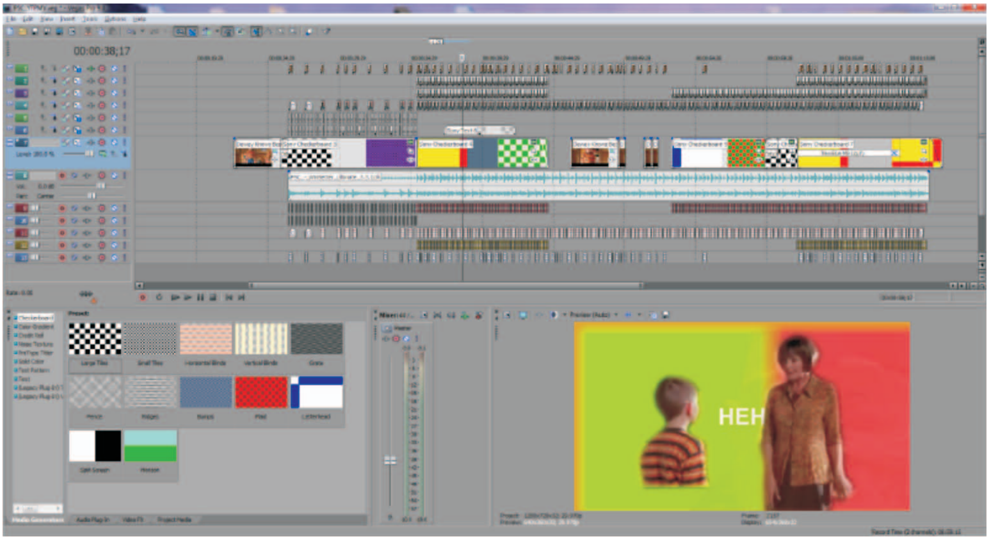

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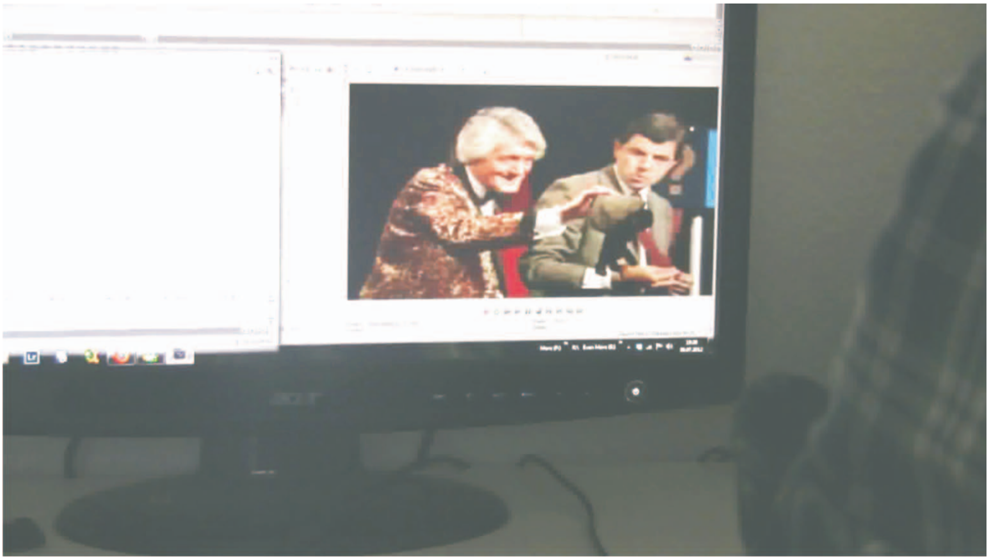

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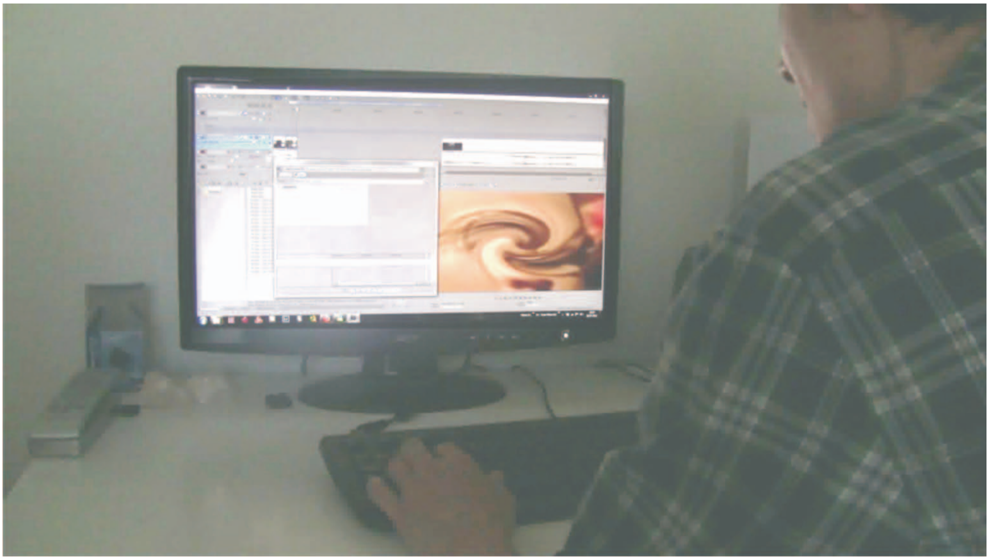

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Staging Icons, Performing Storyworlds – From Mystery Play to Cosplay

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Abstract. One of the oldest complex forms of intermediality is the static live-performance adaptation of the iconographic qualities of well-known stories. Early examples of this phenomenon are the depictions of biblical scenes in the form of grand (and largely static) tableaux in medieval Mystery Plays, very popular until the emergence of the professional entertainment stage. The nineteenth century had its fascination with the *tableaux vivants* – not coincidentally during the time that photography was introduced – and the late twentieth century saw the beginning of the newest variety with cosplay, which has by now become a global cultural phenomenon. Cosplay, the activity of fans dressing up and posing in a visually recognizable way as characters from popular media franchises such as manga, anime, or TV series, developed from role-playing activities into its current, highly ritualized static form through its symbiosis with amateur photography. This paper wants to first analyse the underlying art form in its historical varieties from an intermedial perspective, and in connection with that, it will explore the deeper philosophical significance of this practice, looking particularly at the role of embodiment.

Keywords: performance, iconography, mystery plays, cosplay, embodiment.

What do the medieval Mystery Plays, the *tableaux vivants*, and the newly emerged global phenomenon of cosplay have in common with regards to intermediality? Or rather, in how far do they all share a comparable intermedial practice? One way to answer that question would be to say that they are all forms of the predominantly static live-performance adaptation of the iconographic qualities of well-known narrative existents. Or, in other words, all three of these practices take elements of a storyworld well-known to its audience – we will focus here mainly on characters – and then use a life performance to visualize these elements or characters by having them embodied through actors. This is a similarity in formal terms, but we will see that this is grounded in comparable philosophical attitudes towards, or conceptions of storyworlds, so that the specific media use – and the change in media – becomes in itself a message.

The earliest example of this practice that will be considered here can be found in the theatrical modes used by medieval mystery plays. Mystery plays are biblical dramas that were staged all throughout Europe from the 13th to the later 16th century. They were the only form of dramatic entertainment at the time, and they were usually produced each year by a town and its different guilds on the occasion of special religious holidays, most importantly the feast day of Corpus Christi. The purpose of the mystery plays was to instruct the laity about the essential features of the Christian faith, but they were also very elaborate, highly spectacular, and logistically complicated affairs. They surely provided as much entertainment and aesthetic pleasure to their audience as they did divine instruction. There are very few contemporary pictures of pageant wagons. The closest analogies can be found in 16th-century Flemish paintings. In these images you can see nicely the care and effort that went into the creation of the wagons as well as the costumes that appeared on them.

The most common form was that of a cycle of a number of mini-dramas or pageants. The complete cycle of e.g. the Corpus Christi plays would be nothing less than a history of the universe from its creation all the way to Judgment Day, but the individual pageants would represent well-known episodes like the temptation of Eve, the building of the Ark, the annunciation, or, of course, the crucifixion. The most common staging practice used so-called pageant wagons that were each created and paid for by a different guild, on which the mini-dramas that constituted the cycle would be staged. These mobile stages would then be pulled through the city along a pre-determined route, with a number of fixed stops, or "stations." At each of these stations, the respective episode was then performed once, before the whole trek moved on. For the spectator, the effect was very much that the whole spectacle took on a processional quality. If the spectator remained stationary, the episodes would pass by him like a procession, which after all was one of the sources for these staging practices. And if the spectator moved around, the experience would be similar to watching a story unfold through a number of stained-glass windows in a church or the pages of a Book of Hours.[1] This quality is of prime importance here, not the text or even the rudimentarily enacted events, the acting or action, but rather the relative predominance of a tableau-like presentation, of relatively static life performances that were to a large extend understandable merely by looking at them. As Twycross writes, "spectacle can speak more strongly than words" (1994, 37).[2]

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[1] "One view sees the pageants as a picture sequence, the same in kind and intent as those of Books of Hours or stained-glass windows which feature the events of Incarnation or Passion frame by frame: a parallel emphasised by the framing effect of the pageant wagon. The overall effect is thus cumulative rather than integrated. There is much to be said for this view" (Twycross 1994, 45).

The target medium is in all three examples a life performance. In most cases, such a move from image (or, as we will see, iconic property) to stage representation is also a sequentialization, compartmentalizing the narrative events that are presented simultaneously into a temporal sequence. This is our usual intermedial perspective on these kinds of adaptations, stressing the difference between spatial and temporal media. But the stage – or, more abstractly, bodily performance – is both temporal and spatial. In fact, it adds very important aspects of spatiality: it adds three-dimensionality compared to images, and it adds physical presence to the aspect of time. A statue is also physically present, but this presence is (ideally) timeless, whereas a *living statue* – we all know these obnoxious performers from the pedestrian areas of the world – by emphasizing its ephemerality (it could start to move and "lose the pose" any second) makes the bodily presence much more immediate. It is this effect I am interested in, which is why I focus on performances that restrict sequentiality and movement over time. That is, I am not interested in acting – in the sense of actors making events happen – as in the aspect of representing through embodying. Representation and embodiment will therefore be the main focus.

After having endured almost unrivalled for centuries, the mystery plays vanish as theatrical practice in the course of the 16th century, the most important reasons for their demise being the introduction of the Reformation with its hostility to the creation of icons, and, especially in England, the emergence of a mimetic stage with the theatre companies of William Shakespeare and his contemporaries. The historically second use of this practice, the *tableau vivant*, will not be analyzed in any detail here, but it should at least be mentioned as a historical bridge to show that the general phenomenon did by no means end with the emergence of the modern stage.

A tableau vivant, or "living picture," is most commonly a life performance of a famous image from art history, or the creation of an image with allegorical or historical meaning. It is even more a-temporal than the *tableau*-like experience of the mystery plays, in that usually all kinds of movement or speech are excluded from the performance. It thus attempts to merge the media of the stage with those of painting or photography. The 19th century was the heyday of this form, when even members of the royal family participated. And its appeal only rose with the emergence of photography. It was only through photography that the process of re-mediation came full circle, from image to performance and back to image. Around the turn of the 20th century, photography as well as the movies quickly shifted interest towards a capturing of movement and therefore marginalized the practice of the static *tableau vivant*. And yet, as I want to argue, the practice has returned to prominence with the end of the twentieth century and is on its way to becoming a world-wide cultural phenomenon in the twenty-first, and it does so through the activity usually described as "cosplay."

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[2] For detailed descriptions of the stage settings, stage effects, and costumes of medieval mystery plays, cf. Anderson 1963, 115–170.

Cosplay as a term is a compound of the words "costume" and "play" (with play additionally referencing role-play). It describes the activity of fans dressing up and posing in a *visually recognizable* way as characters from popular media franchises such as manga, anime, TV series, or superhero comics. This is a difference to other costuming activities such as Halloween or Mardi Gras, and one that is of great importance to our concerns: whereas for Halloween you might dress up as *a* cowboy, cosplayers always represent a *specific* character that pre-exists in one or, more often, several stories. Like the mystery plays, cosplay is not an everyday activity, but also usually happens on designated "feast days," most often conventions about comics, or video games, where there are designated areas for cosplayers and often also cosplay competitions. This significantly adds to the ritualistic character of the performances.

Cosplay is a truly intercultural phenomenon in which especially American and Japanese cultures interrelate in a complex and intricate way. Both cultures have developed their own source iconography. American fans dressing up as characters from the *Star Trek* series in the 1980s were the original inspiration for manga and anime cosplay in Japan, which has developed by now into a whole subculture (cf. Winge 2006, 66f.). On its way there, cosplay has also developed its own performative rituals.

Believers and Otaku: From Adoration to Moe

In order to better understand the possible connections between these examples, which seem to lie, culturally and historically speaking, as far apart as is possible, it will be helpful to address some core issues of intermediality, particularly in the sense of a media change through adaptation. What is the common ground, we might ask, the point of convergence of such intermediality from the point of view of a literary or cultural scholar? What is that 'thing' that can be transported from one medium to another, that can be added to by a third, or be expressed simultaneously in all three? In my understanding, the most important answer to that question would be: the mental construct that we call a narrative storyworld and its existents. These of course do not have to be fictional, but the general claim would be here that we make sense of our world, of what we come to know about our world, by narrativizing it (e.g. Boyd 2009, 131), and therefore by mentally projecting storyworlds in which events take place and things exist. That is, we constantly construct storyworlds, and we relate all medial representations of existents (be it people, objects, or events) to the storyworlds that we construct. Thinking about storyworlds, and especially attitudes towards storyworlds, can therefore help us tremendously in understanding trans- or intermedial practices, just as these practices can enlighten us on different concepts of storyworlds and how people relate them to the actual world.

I will try to illustrate that rather abstract point by looking at the practices of "staging icons." Thus we can see that not only are there intriguing similarities in its different intermedial forms, but there are also connections in the underlying concepts. In its shortest form, my argument would run somewhat like this:

- the *source* from which the performative remediations take their material are narrative storyworlds
    - in the case of the mystery plays: the traditional stories of mythology as codified in biblical narrative[3]
    - or, in the case of cosplay, the consciously created narrative worlds of large story franchises like superheroes and manga
- the *motivation* for the remediation lies in the desire not only to make visible the source material in medial representations (as would be the case with illustration for example), but to embody it, to give it bodily presence in the actual world
- the *reason* for this motivation lies in a paradoxical attitude towards the storyworld, an attitude that understands the storyworld as not only having a symbolic or referential relation to the actual world, but as having its own ontological level of existence that is equal or even higher than that of the actual world.[4]

In the case of the medieval mystery plays, we call this attitude religious belief or adoration, the belief that stories about the transcendental, about angels, miracles, and the incarnation of God in human flesh refer to realities. In the case of cosplay, an important term that we might use is *moe*.

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[3] All mythologies and religions have used narrative and stories to communicate their ideas, their explanations of the origin and purpose of life. Thus, they have always created narrative worlds: stories of titans, gods, and the sons of gods.

[4] It also means regarding the elements contained in a storyworld as if they were not reducible to the storyworld's concrete representation.

Moe is a Japanese slang word. It is highly controversial, both concerning its origin and its meaning, but it has also become central to discussions of Japan's pop culture.[5] The term and its use in Japan is bound up with debates about subcultures and concrete representational forms,[6] but my approach to the term is more abstract, since I am interested in it as a general relation between a recipient and a fictional existent. In this sense, *moe* is, negatively speaking, a confusion of categories: it means attaching kinds of or intensities of feeling to a fictional object that should be reserved for actual objects.[7] The most well-known example would be that of a person falling in love with a fictional character. The person that experiences *moe* therefore regards a fictional object as if it were real – not cognitively (he still knows the character is fictional, he is not yet Don Quijote), but emotionally. The main reason why this "should" be regarded as a mistake is a rational one: because there is no reason to desire something that does not exist.

Of course, we all know that our reactions to fictional events or characters are never purely rational: we have hopefully all been scared when reading a book or cried while watching a movie, or maybe even when playing a video game. In fact, this "mistake" is one of the main reasons why we enjoy fiction, the reason why we *need* fiction. *Moe* just means that the experience is not limited to the actual process of reception (the time spent reading a book, watching a movie, or looking at an image). It is the *continuation* of this experience, of this emotional attachment, that is certainly part of the motivation for cosplay: the desire to make tangible, to give a bodily, three-dimensional presence to a storyworld and its existents *beyond* its original source text or image. This paradoxically supports the object's perceived claim of actual existence in a very similar way that the "staging" or embodying of the body of Christ is a proof of the real existence of that body and its doctrinal message.

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[5] At the Japan Pavilion of the 9th Venice Biennale of Architecture in 2004, Morikawa Kaichirou placed the word "*moe*" alongside *wabi* and *sabi,* Japan's distinguished aesthetics (cf. Galbraith 2009). In a sense, moe is almost the opposite of the *wabi sabi* aesthetics: Where one designates the acceptance and celebration of imperfection in reality, *moe* means the unwillingness to accept that a perceived perfection is unattainable (because fictional).

[6] E.g. with what characters are *moe* and what sub-categories exist.

[7] "Takuro Morinaga believes *moe* is a much stronger sentiment, and is about being in love with an animation character (36). This is not just a strong penchant in the sense of being a fan, but love for and the need to be with the character as if it were human" (Sharp 2011, 66f).

I would therefore argue that the waning of religious belief does not eliminate the emotional relation that has brought forth the desire for embodiment of storyworlds. On the contrary, I would like to argue for the primacy of that relation and the resulting urge. Moe attitudes are also often addressed in quasi-religious terms, Galbraith for example talks about "the culture of idolizing fantasy characters."[8]

Representing Storyworlds

Now that we have looked at the motivation, let's take a closer look at the representational issues involved, the question of the material and its re-mediations. Our concern, as we have seen, is with the representation of characters from a narrative storyworld. These storyworlds can have their origin in a number of media, such as oral communication, written text, drawings or paintings, stained-glass windows, but also the stage or the screen itself. My main argument in terms of representation is concerned with the use of iconic properties: both mystery plays and cosplay establish concrete references to characters from narrative worlds that pre-exist the performance. The main purpose of the representational aspect of their performance is therefore recognizability: you have to "get" the performance for it to really work: *that* must be Jesus, and *that* must be Megaman. The interesting question for our purposes here is: when do the existents that make up the respective source material (need to) take on iconic properties?

As long as every single story creates its own storyworld, elements don't have to be memorable in the sense of being recognizable. Hemingway can call the protagonists of his short story *Hills like White Elephants* simply "the American and the girl" – thus making them virtually indistinguishable from millions of others – because they exist only in and for this one story, and more importantly, this one text. But as soon as characters *reoccur* in *several* stories, or when the same story is being told in different ways, maybe even through several different media (often without a concrete single source text), the reoccurring elements need distinctive attributes to make them recognizable. The easiest possibility to create recognizability is the use of proper names. Don't call your characters "the American and the girl," but rather Humbert Humbert, or Ulysses. Then you could simply say: let me tell you another story about Ulysses and his adventures, and everyone will know that it is *another* story about the *same* Ulysses. And yet, readers will most likely still crave for more convincing proofs of the identity of the "new" with the "old" Ulysses. They might, for example, eagerly wait for the point where he proves his superior cunning, and therefore proves that he really is "the" Ulysses.

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[8] The use of "idol" in this context is not mere coincidence, since another important part of otaku culture are the music "idols," fabricated personas of very young female singers and dancers that are also the basis for fan obsessions.

Moving back to our main examples, we can say that Christianity in theory is of course heavily text-based, but that only with the Reformation, with its strong emphasis on scripture (greatly helped by promoting vernacular translations), its emphasis on actual acquaintance with the source text, does this basis become available. In the medieval catholic context, the concrete text-base would not be readily available to the mass of people. And yet the same people would be very well acquainted with the respective storyworlds. They knew the stories and the characters without being able to refer to a single, concrete source. This is where the visual arts come in, creating a vast number of adaptations of the biblical stories in all available media that do not rely on language.[9] And in order to do that, they developed an elaborate iconography, that is, a number of visual signs such as specific colors, forms such as the halo, or objects that are all to be understood as directly referencing specific characters, events, or concepts.

This iconography is also of prime importance to the staging practice of the mystery plays. Certainly, they were never intended to be used as reading matter (cf. Davidson 1991, 66f. and Tydeman 1994, 1). As I tried to show, they were experienced much more like living images than as a modern stage performance. Within the dramatic framework of the medieval plays, there was only very little time to establish the numerous characters appearing, from St Joseph to Herod. Also, the lack of fixed seating made it doubtful that everyone would understand all the words. But then, of course, all the spectators already knew the different stories very well – the only precondition was that they recognized *which* story they were being presented with. The performances therefore had to draw on the vast pool of visual symbols that had developed throughout the history of Christian art in order to ease identification beyond the written word. Elaborate masks, iconic costumes, haloes, and the carrying of attributes are all important parts of the performances (cf. Carpenter and Twycross 2002, 191–232).

When we look to the storyworlds created for superhero comics or manga and anime franchises, we can immediately spot some interesting similarities. First of all, they are also modeled on the structure of mythological narratives: they project complex worlds filled with a large cast of characters that interact, but who also fill their individual and independent narrative arcs. They are concerned with origin stories as well as often eschatological stories (stories about the end of the world). They are told through multiple texts and often several media, by multiple authors that refer to a shared understanding of the storyworld. Indeed, the original understanding of "canon" is regularly applied to discussions of whether a concrete instantiation (like a movie adaptation or a new comic series) is in accordance with the original storyworld. On the other hand (and this is also a similarity with mythical narrative), they are often re-told with slight or substantial alterations ("let's tell the story of Superman's origin again!") to the point where the source text is lost (or at least loses its authority). The "canon" of the Superman story is not defined by its first telling, in the comic book *Action Comics No. 1* from 1938 (where Superman is not even able to fly).

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[9] In fact, both mystery plays and cosplay crucially restrict the use of spoken language and thereby further emphasize physical presence. Cosplayers almost always perform silently, and in the mystery plays, the silence of the suffering Christ is both a central performative and doctrinal aspect (cf. Aronson-Lehavi 2011, 87 and 120f).

Compared to the invented mythology of superhero narratives, or the almost infinite pantheon of manga and anime characters, Christian mythology seems almost reduced in its dramatis personae. The website *Anime Planet* is a database of anime and manga characters, and lists almost 50.000 different named characters.[10] And given this incredible number of recurring characters, who need to be highly recognizable in order to create fans or followers, it is hardly surprising that iconic properties play as big a role as they do. Talking in terms of media technology, it was only the printing technique of halftone color, popularized in the early decades of the 20th century, that enabled cheap reproduction of colours, and with it the establishment of the infinite storyworlds of superheroes. Even more so than symbols or specific forms, it is the iconic color schemes that make these characters so instantly recognizable. In manga, these color schemes routinely also include outrageous colors for the character's hair and their eyes, which true cosplayers are eager to imitate as well.

Beyond physical trappings such as color-coded costumes, masks' or props, mystery plays and cosplay use another aspect that is especially useful for their chosen medium, the life performance. The limited space of the medieval mobile stages did not allow for much realistic acting, but of course actors did not stand still. One thing they used to great iconic effect were gestures. These gestures, many of which were well established in Christian iconography, had to be distinct, visible, and recognizable, that is, characteristic (cf. Davidson 2001, 66–127 and Aronson-Lehavi 2011, 106–115). The same is true for most cosplay performances, where acting space and viewing time is limited. Like important religious figures, most manga and superhero characters also have their own specific and characteristic pose, and any cosplay performances usually includes these. This further emphasizes, especially in the Japanese context, the static nature of cosplay performance (cf. Winge 2006, 73).[11]

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[10] Cf. *http://www.anime-planet.com/* Last accessed 21. 02. 2014.

Performing Storyworlds

The most fascinating aspect of the practices of "staging icons" is of course that they are not only representational, but also performative: though, as we have seen, representational properties like colors, forms, or gestures are adapted from earlier occurrences in other media, all of these are re-mediated through the physical presence of the performer. In fact, the first thing that one can observe is that in all of these practices, there is a constant doubling of presence and representation: both the performers and the spectators are constantly and simultaneously aware of the bodily presence of the performer *and* of what he is representing.[12] In the context of both the mystery plays and cosplay, one element that stresses this doubleness is the fact that the same narrative character is embodied by several performers *at the same time*.[13] Within the complete mystery play cycle, multiple actors would perform in the same role. In York, for example, there were at least twenty-two actors employed for the role of Jesus Christ, who of course appears in a large number of individual pageants. Thus, all of these actors would be understood to embody and to signify Christ, but nobody would have *identified* them with him. They were all merely serving as images – icons – of the character. But, crucially they were also more than that, because they were also representing his main attribute, his main doctrinal function: by giving bodily presence to Jesus Christ, they also signified the incarnation, the word made flesh, in what we might call an intermedial performance of transubstantiation (cf. Stevens 1995, 38–39). We should remember here that the most important feast day for the staging of mystery plays was Corpus Christi, which has the main doctrinal purpose of celebrating the Real Presence of the body and blood of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist.

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[11] The identity of the person of the performer and the visual, iconic trappings of the performance also highlights the craftsmanship involved (cf. Aronson-Lehavi 2011, 90), and this aspect has been and still is a very important aspect of the practice. Already in the medieval plays, the motivation of showing religious devotion became mixed with a strong element of civic pride and artistic showmanship (cf. Twycross 1994, 42). The guilds spent a lot of effort and money on their performances, and there was frequently a direct (and sometimes rather macabre) relation between their specific play and their trade. And today, no self-respecting cosplayer would dream of appearing at a convention in a ready-made costume, maybe ordered online. Thus, the act of creation is really and visibly inscribed in the performance.

[12] The secularization of the embodiment of Christian mythology (from the clergy of liturgical drama to the citizen participation in the mystery plays) can be seen as a re-discovery of the stage's ability to enable a hybrid form that combines identificatory performance and the bodily representation of a fictional/ imaginary other that has its source in different narrative media. This hybridity is then – with the end of the mystery plays – continuously lessened in the main development of the stage as a medium for storytelling: here, the focus shifted away from participation to reception and installed an ever-widening gap between actors and spectators. The main stages of this development are the professionalization of theatre in the early modern period, the development of the indoor-theatre with its proscenium arch and curtains, and finally the move to the movie screen, which repeated the act of physical and temporal separation between performance and reception from the earlier move from oral to written storytelling. But, I would like to argue, this hybridity is conserved to a much larger extent in the practice that I am focusing on, especially in the *tableaux vivants* and in contemporary cosplay.

[13] Aronson-Lehavi talks in this respect of "religious and iconic personae" as well as "iconic 'molds' that can be filled and refilled by different performers," 2001, 4f., cf. also 95–106.

In the Christian context, the physical presence of the body of Christ is a central doctrinal element. Interestingly, this element was one of the ideas that were fought by Protestant theology – here, the presence of the text substitutes the presence of Christ, as can be seen in the re-interpretation of the doctrine of transubstantiation (cf. Beckwith 2001, 59ff.).[14] And suddenly, staging icons comes dangerously close to worshipping idols. Thus, in order not to commit a sacrilege, the body of Christ on the stage is substituted with the body of mere mortal man, and the story of a humanist, and realist renaissance theatre can begin.[15]

As we can see, in mystery play performance we have a simultaneity of the represented and the real body of the performer. And something of that medial and conceptual-philosophical doubling is also present in the practice of cosplay. The first obvious similarity is the multiplication of performers of the same character within one setting. At all cosplay conventions, you will notice the multiple presence of some of the more popular characters, like Spider Man or Sailor Moon.

When it comes to explaining cosplay as an individual activity, most common assumption for the relation between the cosplay performer and the represented character is identification. The arguments usually run like this: someone who dresses up as a fictional character wants to *be* that character (and not be him- or herself). I don't want to argue against the existence of such a motivation, but only that the phenomenon goes beyond that, that the cosplayers are not only trying to enter into the storyworld (by way of identification) but also to bring forth, to embody the storyworld in the actual world. These performances do not, as Erika Fischer-Lichte has argued for any performance, escape reality, but constitute it (cf. 2005, 27). To defend this claim, I want to look at the staging rituals of cosplay.[16] One interesting fact is that cosplay developed from activities that were closer to role-playing into its current, highly ritualized and predominantly static form only through its symbiosis with amateur photography. A cosplay performance is of course something that can and should be watched by spectators, but it really comes into its own through the ritual act of taking a picture. In cosplay, the spectator – in the form of the cosplay photographer – is not merely passive; his participatory and performative role becomes obvious. There is, especially in Japan, a very formalized ritual:

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[14] In terms of media history, it is not least the introduction of printing that enabled the protestant emphasis on the concrete textual basis of Christianity (by making identical copies available), valuing the proper name over recognizable visual iconography.

[15] But with it also the gradual "flattening" of the performance through limiting the audience's spatial position. To an extent, the performance on the Shakespearean stage was created for a fluid spectator position. Already the proscenium theatre depended on its staged illusion on a specific angle for the spectator's gaze. The *tableau vivant* creates its effect and performance around a single, specific point of view: there is, in theory, one point of view from which the performance perfectly imitates the (two-dimensional) presentation of the painting. Of course, part of the appeal here is the interplay between the point of perfect visual similarity and the fact that the three-dimensional bodily presence of the performance allows the viewer to change this point of view, to look "inside" or "around" the image.

– the photographer approaches the cosplayer and asks for the permission to take a picture

– the cosplayer agrees and starts to strike a number of characteristic poses or gestures

– the photographer takes one or several image

– *both* participants thank each other (and I don't think this is just Japanese politeness, it is an acknowledgement that both have performed their function)

– in a more intimate context than the large conventions, the photographer will often later give prints or copies of the images to the cosplayer.

The photographer's presence points to the performer's awareness that what he or she engages in is a staged representation, made for someone to watch, and not a move into a different world or identity. We can see this also in the fact that the cosplayers themselves very often take pictures of each other. This is a very different emphasis from some of the more extreme forms of role-playing, such as live-action role-playing, or Renaissance fairs, where every element that is "out of character" – such as a modern camera – would be regarded as an illusion-breaking intrusion. At the same time, the camera de-temporalizes the performances, by capturing and preserving the moment of perfect verisimilitude, very much comparable to turn-of-the-century *tableaux vivants*, and it finally returns it to a medium that is similar to the source's original.

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[16] Another argument would be the prominence of sculpture in manga/anime culture. Collectible and carefully crafted three-dimensional figurines of manga characters are one of the main sub-sections of Japanese pop-culture, with a mind-boggling number of such figurines being sold in large specialized department stores, showing the importance that three-dimensional presence (even besides life performance) has in such *moe* attitudes towards fictional characters. A fan who displays such figurines at his home also rather brings forth the characters' storyworld than entering it.

As we have seen, the doubling of representation and embodiment in the Christian context serves a real theological purpose; the medial change effected by the performance reflects the reality of a religious belief, the move from word to flesh, from image to incarnation. But, as I have argued at the beginning, the psychological drive that underlies this belief is certainly older than Christianity and also works in completely different contexts, post- or non-Christian. Because in all of these cases, the characters and their bodies that form the source of the adaptation, are bodies that transcend mere physicality, are transcendental or magical bodies, hybrid hyperbodies that are a result of a mixed descent from Gods and humans, or of a God taking on human form, or a human acquiring superpowers through radioactivity or genetic mutation, or by merging with a mechanical body.

The French artist Antonin Artaud is most famous for his concept of the theatre of cruelty, a concept that is also closely connected to the kind of total theatre that is involved when actors really embody the suffering of Christ in a mystery play. In 1947, for a radio play entitled *Pour en finir avec le jugement de Dieu* (*To Have Done With the Judgment of God*), Artaud developed the further concept of the "body without organs:" "Man is sick because he is badly constructed. We must make up our minds to strip him bare in order to scrape off that animalcule that itches him mortally, god, and with god his organs. For you can tie me up if you wish, but there is nothing more useless than an organ. When you will have made him a body without organs, then you will have delivered him from all his automatic reactions and restored him to his true freedom" (1982, 79).

The *moe* character, one might argue, is just such a "body without organs" (cf. also Galbraith), precisely because its original body exists purely in the realm of the storyworld, a storyworld that on the one hand does not include God, and that can therefore liberate the character's body from all limitations. Most of the bodies chosen for cosplay are in fact hyper-bodies, super-powered or magic-driven bodies, or bodies that showcase the perfection of the Japanese ideal of *kawai* cuteness. Such powers as well as character traits are often visually written into these bodies – and it is a central paradox of these performances that they attempt to incarnate the hyperbody without ever being able (or even willing) to go beyond the limitations of the physical, of the performer's own body, which is after all their chosen medium.[17] This is where they meet up with the mystery plays: as representations, they are adaptations of signs without a reducible source, and as performance, through their intermedial shift from visual sign to bodily presence, they paradoxically lament, contradict, and acknowledge the recognition that only in storyworlds can the body be really free.

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[17] Manga, anime, and superhero comics render the hyperreality of their character's bodies through visual dynamics, a spatial energy that is yet contained in the outline. They are flat surfaces seemingly striving for three-dimensionality, for physical presence. Especially manga and anime have, in their development of a distinct visual style, emphasized the "flatness" of the image over the three-dimensional illusion of the central perspective. The reasons for this lie only partly in technical constrictions. But the "flat" style of depiction is often in strong contrast to the spatial conception of these characters, since these tend to emphasize three-dimensionality through the "bulginess" of their bodies, which is further enhanced by the frequent – and frequently oversized – appendages to them through hair, costumes, and accessories such as, most prominently, gigantic swords. Lara Croft is certainly not the only imaginary character whose bodily form defies the laws of gravity and anatomy, but it is these very challenges to and of three-dimensionality that cosplayers engage in with the most enthusiasm.

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Rheo: Japanese Sound Art Interrogating Digital Mediality

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Abstract. The article asks in what ways the Japanese sound artist, Ryoichi Kurokawa's audiovisual installation, *Rheo: 5 Horisonz* (2010), is "digital." Using professor Lars Elleström's concept of "mediality," the main claim in this article is that *Rheo* not only uses digital technology but also interrogates digital mediality as such. This argument is pursued in an analysis of *Rheo* that draws in various descriptions of digital media by N. Catherine Hayles, Lev Manovic, Bolter and Grusin among other. The article will show how the critical potential in *Rheo* is directed both towards digital media as a language (Meyrowitz) (or a place for representation) and towards the digital as a milieu (Meyrowitz) or as our culture (Gere). The overall goal of the article is not just analyse this singular artwork, but also to show how sound art can contribute to our understanding of our own contemporary culture as a digital culture.

Keywords: digital aesthetics, sound art, audiovisual installations, mediality, glitch.

In 2010 the Japanese sound artist Ryoichi Kurokawa (born in 1978)[1] received the prestigious Ars Electronica Prize in the category Digital Music and Sound Art for his audiovisual installation *Rheo: 5 Horizons* (from here on just "Rheo"). The installation consists of an eight minute long video loop that is projected onto five large plasma-displays.[2] On these five screens we see a mesmerizing combination of field recordings and HD pictures of nature, juxtaposed with digitally-crafted, vertiginous patterns. Each display is connected to a small loudspeaker and has its own audio and visual output. The sounds and movements on the individual screens are, however, highly synchronized and function as one unit. For instance patterns often move across the five screens [Fig. 2].

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[1] See more information on the artist's website: *http://www.ryoichikurokawa.com/*. Last accessed 24. 09. 2014.

[2] Samples from the video can be found online. E.g. http://vimeo.com/31319154. Last accessed 24. 09. 2014.

Why is *Rheo* a particularly interesting case for a festival for “art, technology and culture?”[3] And why is this a particularly interesting artwork in the category digital music and sound art? An obvious answer is that we in *Rheo* see something that is only possible due to digital technology: for instance the extremely tight syncronisation of the audio and visual elements is an overwhelming effect that is only possible due to digital technology. Furthermore the main part of the video-loop consists of visual patterns and sounds that could never be made without the use of digital software. This is for instance seen in the way the images are dissolved into layers or the use of glitches in both images and sounds. However, most of the music, the films, and the audio-visual imagery we are surrounded by today is already deeply depended on digital technology and could not be made using analogue equipment. Just think of the well-defined, compressed soundscape of the Hi-Fi recording on an average pop-song. So why is *Rheo* a particularly digital artwork? In this article I will argue that this installation is not only dependent on – or using the possibilities of – digital technology. It also interrogates and exposes the characteristics of digital media as such. It is therefore an artwork that “talks about” digital, contemporary culture.

Digital Mediality

In more recent research on intermediality there has been an increasing focus on the specificity of media, their “mediality.” In the Swedish professor Lars Elleström’s analysis of “mediality” this is not defined as a prescriptive concept (Elleström, 2010). His argument is not within the discourse of a modernistic, puristic paradigm. Rather his goal is to establish a more descriptive vocabulary concerning how we describe or define the specific way in which a media is a media. Using Elleström’s vocabulary we can talk about the “medianess” or “mediality” of digital media, without talking about the specific gadgets or the technology. Using Meyrowitz’s distinctions between different understandings of what a media is one could perhaps claim that Elleström offers a more refined way of talking about “media as language” (Meyrowitz, 1997).

In the following analysis the strategy is to claim that what scholars such as Lev Manovich, Jay David Bolter, and Richard Grusin, and N. Katherine Hayles are describing when they talk about “immediacy” “hypermediacy” (Bolter and Grusin 2002), the “cultural layer versus the computer layer” (Manovich 2001,

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[3] This is how The Ars Electronica festival describes it self at its homepage. *http://www.aec.at/about/en/.* Last accesed 01. 09. 2014.

43), or the “flickering signifiers” (Hayles 1993, 77) is *digital mediality.* I will analyse how these concepts relate to Kurokawas installation in order to pursue my argument that this audiovisual installation is in fact interrogating digital mediality.

However, during this analysis I will also show how *Rheo*, in its investigation of digital mediality, seems to transgress this understanding of media as language and instead unfolds a more broad investigation of “media as a milieu,” which is Meyrowitz’s third category (Meyrowitz 1997). In this part of the analysis I will also include Mark B. N. Hansen’s discussion of what the computer is to us today. He argues that Manovich’s description of how the computer has changed from a “number crunching machine” to a “media synthesizer” needs to be expanded because the computer today is more than a media synthesizer. Today computer rather combines or connects human experiences (Hansen 2009). I find this argument interesting because it shows the limits of an analysis that focuses very specific on Elleström’s level of mediality. In conclusion, my article is not just about Kurokawa’s installation but also serves as an example of about how we analyse art works that question digital technology.

A key concept in Elleström’s description of mediality is that each mediality is composed of four basic modalities (Elleström 2010): the semiotic, the sensoric, the tempo-spatial, and the material. I have chosen to structure my analysis according to these modalities. In the literature on sound art the question of the sensory modes is very common, e.g. Helga de la Motte-Haber’s seminal book on sound art or *Klangkunst* (Motte-Haber 1999), where she describes sound art as an art form to be both seen and heard. The tempo-spatial modality is also well-described in Motte-Haber’s analysis because she deals specifically with sound installations and sound sculptures, where the installations and sculptures are given an explicit temporal dimension due to the sound. The question of materiality is also very present in the literature on sound art. Here the focus is primarily on the materiality of sound (Labelle 2007, Voegelin 2010). The semiotic modality is, however, neglected. Or rather, it is consciously marginalized because sound art is described as an art form that escapes representation and semiotics (Labelle 2007). This is in many texts seen as the main quality of sound art. However, in the analysis of Rheo I argue that the semiotic dimension is important. It is, however, quite easy to import analytical tools from either digital poetry of general thought regarding digital remediation. All in all, my analytical approach is in its core intermedial and interdisciplinary.

The Semotic Modality: Signs and Representation

During the last decade, there has been a growing discourse on the use of glitches, failures, microsound, and such in sound art. The artist and writer Kim Cascone's essay *The Aesthetics of Failiure: Post-Digital Tendencies in Contemporary Computer Music* (2002) is one if the defining texts on this topic (Demers 2010). Cascone explains that while digital technology in more conventional musical productions aims to conceal itself, the use of malfunctions such as glitches and microsounds are essential to this new "post-digital" aesthetics (Cascone 2002). The main conclusion in Cascone's essay is that the use of glitches makes us aware of that which we normally perceive as the *background* when we interact with media, and in particular digital media.[4] In that sense the use of glitch is a way of "questioning technology" because it leaves a gap in the hermeneutical process (Cascone, 2002).

In *Rheo* there is an extended use of malfunctions and glitches in both sound and image. However, *Rheo* seems to be something else than an "aesthetics of failure," because the main effect of the disturbances of the images in *Rheo* is not only that gaps are inserted in the hermeneutical process, but rather that our attention is being swirled around in a roller-coaster ride: from the imagery to the processuality of software codings, from the represented space in the image to movements on the screen, to movements in the actual space in which the large panels are exhibited.

When we look at the naturalistic still-images of nature on the five large screens in *Rheo* we can to see "through" the screens and experience the pictures, the colors, the compositions, the tactile structures in the depicted materials, the contents and the fictional space of the barren landscapes, etc. This is what Bolter and Grusin call the "logic of immediacy" (Botler and Grusin 2002).

In *Rheo* this "logic of immediacy" is disturbed as the still-images are being transfigured and distorted by digital manipulation. Our gaze is forced away from the representational image, with its Euclidian space, and instead focused on the movements of the patterns on the screens. We now rather look at the screens as a hypermediated space. Following Bolter and Grusin's vocabulary we can say that there is a shift from immediacy to "hypermediacy." Bolter and Grusin explain that: "If the logic of immediacy leads one either to erase or to render automatic the act of representation, the logic of hypermediacy acknowledges multiple acts of representation and makes them visible" (Bolter and Grusin 2002,

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[4] Although Cascone also mentions glitches in a piece of paper, his main concern is the use of failures in computer music.

33). With the many shifts from images to patterns it seems as though immediacy in *Rheo* becomes just an effect of hypermediacy or just an aspect of an overall hypermediated space.

Another well-known dichotomy that is easily transferred to *Rheo* is Manovich's distinction between "the cultural layer" and "the computer layer" of new media. The cultural layer is what we see on the interface – the text we write or the images we see on the screen, while the computer layer is what the computer "sees." Here, the image or text is something completely different than "an image." It is rather a file, a set of data, etc (Manovich 2001, 46). With the extravagant use of digital manipulations of images and sounds *Rheo* seems to exemplify this difference between the cultural layer – the images that the human eye can interpret – and the computer layer. However, these disturbances of the images do not just result in a loss of meaning, but seem to be a celebration of a new potential for meaning formation as the images are turned into beautiful, vertiginous patterns that move not only on the singular screens but also across the five screens combining them. With N. Katherine Hayles, one could say that *Rheo* does not just *cut off* the relation between the signifier and the signified in the image, but instead reveals that the signifiers we see are, in fact, to the computer, the signified. Hayles explains that: "Intervening between what I [the writer, red.] see and what the computer reads is the machine code that correlates alphanumeric symbols with binary digits, the compiler language that correlates these symbols with higher-level instructions determining how the symbols are to be manipulated, the processing program that mediates between these instructions and the commands I give the computer, and so forth. A signifier on one level becomes a signified on the next higher level. Precisely because the relation between signifier and signified at each of these levels is arbitrary, it can be changed with a single global command. If I am producing ink marks by manipulating movable types, changing the font requires changing each line of type. By contrast, if I am producing flickering signifiers on a video screen, changing the font is an easy as giving the system a single command" (Hayles 1993, 77).

Hayles's distinction between the two dynamically interacting languages, is similar to Lev Manovich's distinction between "the cultural layer" and "the computer layer," but Hayles is more elaborate and specific in her analysis of the semiotic processuality of the computer *in use* in the singular speech acts than Manovich, and therefore she is useful in the specific analysis of *Rheo*.

It is characteristic to *Rheo* that there is no movement in the static pictures of nature. The only movement in the video comes from the digital manipulation. Here, for instance, we see how the pictures are dissolved into separate layers or how they are dissolved into abstract patterns that move in one wavelike formation across the screens. We do not, of course, see or hear the complex algorithms themselves, but we can sense the way these flickering signifiers perform in the audio-visual material.

The Sensory Modality

In the entire video, visual movements are tightly synchronized with movements in sound. For instance, a flickering in a picture is followed by a flickering in sound and a horizontal movement across the five screens is followed by a movement in sound from one loudspeaker to the next. This is a general feature in the entire video, but it is for instance seen at 0:13. Such effects are possible because each display is connected to a mono-channel speaker. The most dominating sound in *Rheo* is the complex, high-pitched drone. The drone has several dynamical crescendos that lead up to a change in the visual material, and simultaneously with those changes in the visual, the drone's pitch changes.

The tight synchronization of sound and image has at least two main effects: first of all it is a way to make present digital mediality, because in digital media the auditive and visual materials are not read by two separate, sensorial systems (as in the human perception). Once an image or a sound has been digitalized it is in one way "the same" to the computer, namely data (Kittler 1999, Manovich 2001). The sound and image we hear or see on the screen are thus merely two different ways of representing data. Where the conventional movie would present sound and image in a way that imitates the human sensory perception, *Rheo* makes *explicit* that what we see and hear in digital media is conditioned by a non-human system that is fundamentally different from the human-system.

The tight syncronisation gives us the impression that the images and the sounds are also controlled by the same code or programme. This is only partly true: in his speech at the Ars Electronica in 2010 Kurokawa explains that he uses both a controlling software and manual manipulation in the computer programs in order to synchronize sound and image. Another Japanese sound artist, Ryoji Ikeda, has made the tight syncronisation of sound and image his trademark. In his audiovisual performance *Test Patterns* (2008) we see a constant flux of black and white patterns flowing across a screen and simultaneously we hear glitching, digital sounds that are intimately connected to the movements of the pictures. On his webpage Ikeda writes: "Taking various forms – installations, live performance and recordings – test pattern acts as a system that converts any type of data (text, sounds, photos and movies) into barcode patterns and binary patterns of 0s and 1s. The project aims to examine the relationship between critical points of device performance and the threshold of human perception, pushing both to their absolute limits" (Ikeda, no date). In Ikeda's *Test Patterns* we actually experience an audio-visual output that comes from the same data source. This is not the case in *Rheo*.

The Tempo-Spatial Modality: A Time-Based Sculpture

Another effect of the syncronisation of sound and image is that the movements of the visual material are dramatized sonically and thus enhanced by the sounds. Kurokawa calls *Rheo* a time-space sculpture (Ars Electronica, 2010). Where a more conventional sculpture demarks a space around itself, *Rheo* conditions both the space it inhibits and the temporal dimension. The Danish composer Karl Aage Rasmussen says that music has two different kinds of time: the time it lasts and the time it conditions (Rasmussen 1998), which is a useful analytical distinction in relation to *Rheo*: *Rheo* lasts eight minutes, but similar to a piece of music, its temporal unfolding conditions our experience of time. While at some points, all movement in the video freezes and time pauses; at other points, the movements are extremely fast, many things happen and we experience that time moves faster. Adding to the dynamic temporality of our experience is the way the dynamic crescendos of the drone point *towards* an action that is about to happen, and then happens in the climax of the crescendo. We are positioned in a "before," a "now it happens," and then in the "after" of the climax.

One radical effect in the temporality is that it seems not to be specifically designed for the human sensory ratio: this is for instance seen in the 15 seconds from 4:05-4:20 where the images on the five screens change so fast that we cannot see the individual pictures. The German media theorist Peter Weibel says that the implosion of spatial and temporal constants is characteristic to digital aesthetics (Rötzer 1991). We could conclude that we in *Rheo* thus experience the difference between the system of human perception of time and space, and the digital tempo-spatiality, which is without constants. A similar gesture can been found in Ikeda's *Test Patterns*. *Test Patterns* is full of sounds that are in the periphery of human perception, for instance frequencies that are too high, or moving upwards passing by the threshold of the audible.[5] Thereby the audience experience both the limitations of the human perception and the fact that the digital data are on a fundamental level not based on the human sense perception.

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[5] As experienced in a performance in Aarhus, Denmark, in 2011.

In *Rheo* it seems as though we do not just experience the *difference* between the human system and the non-human system but that we also experience how digital mediality *expands* the human field of time and space (Hansen 2009). In *Rheo* it is not just the temporal and spatial constants of a fictional space that are indeed rendered unstable but also the sense of time and space of the actual social time-space as our attention is being swirled around in several different, juxtaposed spatialities: the fictional space of the images, the flatness or abstract three-dimensionality of the screens, and the actual space of perception.

We are not offered an unmediated, direct access to any of these spaces. Not even the actual social space. They are *all* mediated.

Materiality

There is a general agreement among scholars that even though we surround ourselves with digital technology, we are generally very unaware of what digital technology is or how it operates. This unawareness has to do with the fact that when we use our media gadgets, what we see and hear is conditioned by a layer that *escapes sensation* – namely the mathematics of software (Parikka 2012). Furthermore, we do not need to know what happens behind the interface in order to use for instance our Iphones. On the contrary: new media are specifically designed so that the technology is as invisible as possible. And as we use new media, we are primarily focused on the media content it represents: the text, the image, the music, etc., and not on the technology or the digital processes (Gitelman 2006). In *Rheo* we get to sense what we normally cannot sense, namely the fluctuating mathematics of software. Of course we do not sense the mathematics as such, but we sense the performance of a code or a programme in the audio-visual material. From that perspective the critique in *Rheo* is very modernistic. With *Les Demoiselles D'Avignon (*1907) Paplo Picasso investigated the two-dimensional space of the canvas (Bolter and Grusin 2001) and *Rheo* investigates the multi-dimensional space of the digital display. However, *Rheo* also draws on a more avantgardistic or literal trajectory (Fried 2003). Because this installation is not just exposing the grammatical level of the digital media, it also insists on the literal presence of this technology in our actual social space.

When I experienced *Rheo* I heard the installation, as a distant humming, long before I saw it. And, as already described, when I experienced the installation my head jilted from side to side in order to follow the movements of the pictures across the screens. Perhaps the digital mathematical processes are hidden from our senses, but these processes leaves traces, they surround us with this humming sound that comes from the constant flow of data that is being recorded, manipulated, and transmitted.

The German thinker Martin Seel says that to come out of and to enter into resonating is something that we often experience in modern sound art (Seel 2005). Resonating is, according to Seel, an occurrence without a phenomenally determinable something that occurs. Seel mentions the American composer John Cage's seminal silent piece*, 4'33"* (1952) as an example of an audible resonating silence. In *4'33"* the instrumentalist goes on stage with the instrument, but plays nothing for 4 minutes and 33 seconds. In this silence, the audience experience that the supposedly toneless presupposition of musical sound is actually full of sounds. This is to be understood on a very specific level because the silence of the musician enables the audience to hear the many sounds existing in the concert hall that the music from the scene would normally oppress. In that way what otherwise forms the vague background of perception comes to the fore, "without however being released out of its vagueness" (Seel 2005, 149).

I think it is the same kind of resonating that we experience in *Rheo.* It is the background of our perception in a digital culture that is foregrounded.

Digital Media as "Media Synthesiser and Manipulator" or "Transcendental Technicity"

According to Manovich the computer was initially thought of as an "analytical engine suitable for crunching numbers," while today it functions rather as "a media synthesiser and manipulator (Manovich, 2001, 26). Due to the focus on the digital manipulation of sound and image, it is easy to think of *Rheo* as a critique of the computer as a media synthesiser and manipulator. Or as a critique of digital media an integrated part our acts of representation or our language. However, as mentioned in the analysis above, *Rheo* is more than just a critique of the immediacy of the computer image. What happens in the installation is not just happening *in* the pictures or *on* the screens, but also in the actual, social space, where we move our eyes (and perhaps also our heads) in order to follow the audio-visual movements across the five screens that combines them. Mark B. N. Hansen argues that the computer today cannot be explained by Manovich's model. He says that we should rather distinguish between two distinct functions of media: "whereas media in the first, traditional sense mediates human experience itself (its content is that experience), media in the second sense mediates the technical condition that makes possible such experience – the ‘transcendental technicity’ underlying real experience in our world today” (Hansen 2010, 180). *Rheo* can be read as such a transgression from one program to the other; from “the archiving of individual experience to the generation of collective presence and of connectivity itself” (Hansen 2010, 180n), as the individual pictures on the individual screens are being dissolved and moved across the screen that then become parts of a network.

However I also want to modify this conclusion. Because the individual pictures of landscapes that we see in *Rheo*, do in fact *not* seem to reflect an individual, human experience. If we look at these pictures they all have the same characteristic low horizontal line and none of them have any spectacular content or scenery. There seems to be randomness and automation in the selection and the composition of the pictures. The overall impression is therefore not that we are experiencing something that a warm, living subject has experienced, but rather that we are seeing what a “perception machine” (Virilio 1998) has perceived.

It is Paul Virilio who in 1998 talks about the vision machine, and the “splitting of viewpoint, the sharing of perception of the environment between the animate (the living subject) and the inanimate (the object, the seeing machine)” (Virilio 1998, 62). This “splitting of viewpoint” that Virilio describes in 1998 has indeed become a standard part of our life in 2014. There is, in particular, one point in the video that supports the notion that we are experiencing the extreme speeds of the digital processes of data organization and retrieval – or the “transcendental technicity” – and that is in the 15 seconds (from 4:05–4:20) when the images on the five screens change so fast that we cannot see the individual pictures. Virilio stresses that when we talk about the automation of perception by machines the word “image” is an empty word “since the machine’s interpretation has nothing to do with normal vision […]. For the computer, the optically active electron image is merely a series of coded impulses whose configuration we cannot begin to imagine since, in this ‘automation of perception,’ image feedback is no longer assured” (Virilio 1998, 73).

In *Rheo* it is as though the generosity and playfulness by which the audiovisual material is tossed around demonstrates this fact: that no return image is needed. That imagery is optional to the digital non-human interpretation.

It is a basic condition that we cannot see what is behind the image, behind the interface, but in the mesmerizing speed of the images and in the tight synchronization of sound and image in *Rheo,* we can sense that which we cannot sense, namely the non-human system of interpretation.

The Background of Perception Foregrounded

In Steven Lisberger's movie cypermovie *Tron* (1982), a hacker is abducted into the world of a computer, "the Grid." He is forced to participate in gladiatorial games, but gets help from a security program. In *Tron,* we see a visualization of what it is like to be inside a computer. For instance, the space is without specific constants, and several times it almost transcends into a two-dimensional space, as a line on a black background. In comparison to *Tron,* it is obvious that the *Rheo* is not directly creating a new narrative about what it is like to be human in a digital culture. But still there are many symbolic elements in *Rheo* that signifies something "digital" such as the use of audible and visible glitches in the material. But, as the analysis above has shown, the ability to question our current media-situation lies not merely in the symbolic exchange where the recipient "decodes" a given set of symbols. Instead, *Rheo* establishes its critical potential due to the singular, sensuous act of reception it affords, in which something appears to the recipient's senses.

In his essay on glitches Cascone (2002) states that the use of failure explores the background of digital technology, in the same way the Italian Futurists shifted the focus from the foreground of musical tones to the incidental background noises. In my analysis I have shown how *Rheo* in a similar way allows us to experience the "background" of digital technology that we normally are not aware of. But due to the intervention in the social space of the viewer, *Rheo* also draws our attention to how digital technology actually forms the background of our entire culture. The critical potential of *Rheo* is therefore not just aimed towards the digital media as a language, but also as a milieu (Meyrowitz 1997) or culture (Gere 2008).

It is a common statement among researches in new media that we are already a digital culture (Gere 2008, Manovich 2001). Not just due to the amount of digital technologies *in* our culture, but because these technologies have transformed our culture. We might think that we use media as a channel through which we communicate our general understandings of the world, but several scholars asserts that it is in fact the other way around: our way of thinking is evolved within and for our current "media ecology." A change in our media situation is therefore a change in us (Gere 2008). When Gere wrote the afterword to the second edition of his book on digital culture in 2008, he added: "The need to keep questioning our situation [...] remains more pressing than ever, especially as the technology itself is more and more invisible as it becomes an integral part of the very fabric of existence" (Gere 2008, 224). Such a questioning will of course take place in academia, but as I have tried to show in the analysis above, music and sound art can also participate in a questioning in their own right, not by creating new narratives about digital culture or technology, but by affording an aesthetic, sensuous experience of digital mediality and digital culture. *Rheo* allows us to experience this "integral part" that we otherwise cannot experience. The background of our perception is foregrounded, as a background.

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Figure 1. Screenshot, Kurokawa: *Rheo: 5 Horizons,* 2010.

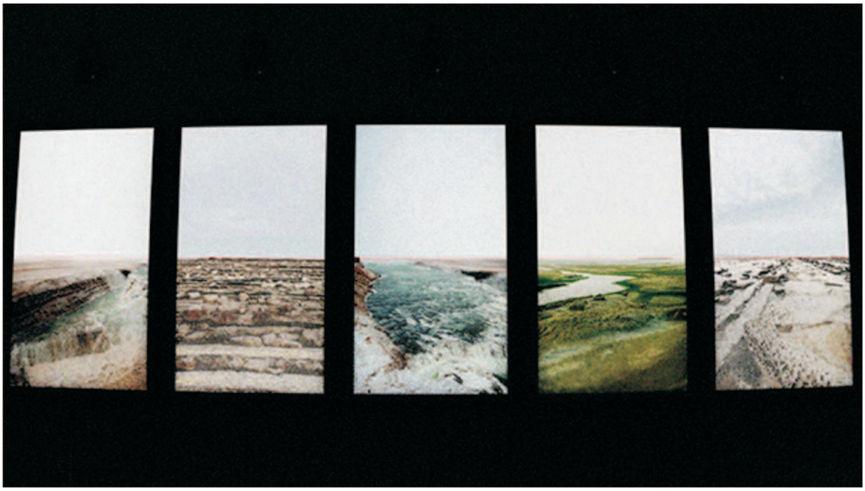
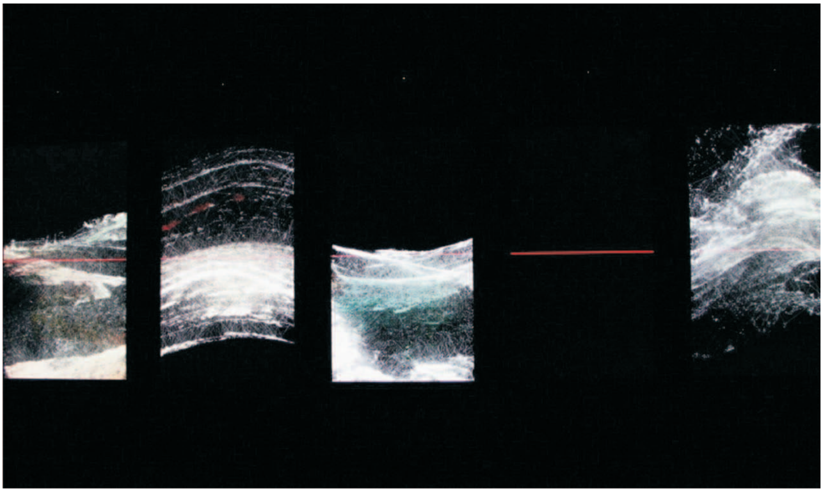


Figure 2. Screenshot, Kurokawa: *Rheo: 5 Horizons,* 2010.



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Intermedia and Intermittency

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Abstract: It is commonly known that medial reflections have been initiated by attempts to secure the borders of discrete medial forms and to define the *modus operandi* of each essentialized medial area. Later on, the focus of study has shifted to plurimedial formations and the interactions between predefined medial genres. In the last few decades, taxonomic approaches to various multi-, inter-, and transmedial phenomena dominated the discussions, which offered invaluable support in mapping the terrain, but at the same time hindered the analysis of the ephemeral, time-dependent aspects of plurimedial operations. While we explore the properties of each medial configuration, we lose sight of the actual historical drivers that produce ever-new configurations. My thesis is that any discourse on intermediality should be paralleled by a discourse on cultural intermittency, and consequently, media studies should involve an approach that focuses on the "ecosystem" of the constantly renewing media configurations from the point of view of their vitalizing potential and capability to trigger heightened experiences. This approach draws much inspiration from K. Ludwig Pfeiffer's media anthropology that gives orientation in my paper.

Keywords: media anthropology, hybrid media configurations, opera(tic), heightened experience, media dynamics.

Let's start with an imaginary collection of works, highbrow and vernacular as well, that are associated with issues of intermediality produced either digital or analogue ways. First, take two chapters from Don Boyd's 1987 compilation opera-movie, *Aria*; the one directed by Franc Roddam and the one by Jean-Luc Godard. Then add two impressive Heineken video spots about football and classical music (*Auditorium*, Heineken Italia – JWT Italy, 2010; *Legendary Football*, Heineken – Wieden + Kennedy, 2011). Then proceed with the "electronic opera," *Desniansky Raion* (2007) by the French artist Cyprian Gaillard; and complete our tiny collection with Peter Greenaway's 1989 art movie, *The Cook, The Thief, His Wife and Her Lover*. I have to give a warning: any detailed analyses on the works of this imaginary collection have to be prolonged for another time; here I have the opportunity to give merely some preliminary hints.

This selection of works consists of diverse genres such as opera movie, feature movie, documentary, commercial spot, and video installation. No matter how huge the differences are regarding their dimensions, their acknowledged aims, their economic structure, modes of exhibition, projection, staging, the respective audiences of these genres, or the ways their medial factors interact in a process of forming a whole, which is more often heterogeneous than not, and finally, the various ways they are located within their immediate cultural context; for the moment, I am focusing on their commonalities.

What are these? Well, to start with, each is a hybrid media configuration. Each one includes music, or some artistically organized sound. However, none of them can be easily defined strictly along aesthetic features, rather by their respective institutional systems. And even if their relative cultural prestige gained by and through their respective institutional system underscores their differences, from a historical point of view, they seem to be close relatives regarding their past and present cultural reception, characterized by on one hand fascination and antagonism on the other, theoretical defence and wholesale criticism, in short, they were not received with a warm welcome or an easily stabilized cultural status.

On the “Operatic Principle”

Starting with the oldest of the genres mentioned above, I recall the debates on *opera* since its onset, which are well known. Its history from the 17th to the 19th century contains an on-going repetition of the so-called opera reform, and even in the 1960’s a powerful guru of contemporary music, Pierre Boulez formulated his alleged suggestion as “the most elegant way of solving the opera problem would be to blow up the opera houses” (Levin 2007, 18).

Well, maybe his suggestion arrived far too belatedly, since from a media anthropological perspective developed in K. Ludwig Pfeiffer’s *The Protoliterary: Steps toward an anthropology of culture* (2002) opera, though not physically but as a distinctive genre has been blown up long ago, maybe before its birth but certainly without being terminated, and the genre has been expanded and spread out to the most various cultural fields, including novels, cinema, and even modern sports events. To indicate a historically conceived guiding force in modern media configurations, Pfeiffer borrows a useful term, “operatic principle” from Herbert Lindenberger’s landmark studies on opera (Lindenberger

1984) to point out relevant drivers of interart, intermedial, and wider cultural shifts. Pfeiffer's approach is that of a Nietzschean sort, that is to say a therapeutic one related to the idea of "great health" on a philosophical level (Nietzsche 1974, 346–347). However, in Pfeiffer's argument, the major role is played not by health but by experience, to be more precise, "heightened experience." And opera (with its roots in Greek tragedy) provides a paradigmatic model for the organized western forms of combining engrossing, fascinating, and participatory experiences and heightened vitality on one hand, and cognitive complexity, a site for contemplation and cultivated reception on the other (Pfeiffer 2002, xvi).[1]

Pfeiffer is not interested in any specific media history – to be more precise: in any specific history of whichever art or medium (2002, xix.) – but rather points out that "the question […] is one of culturally and therefore also personally significant and attractive media configurations" (2002, xviii) which are ideally understood from a universal comparative perspective.

The way opera manages to coordinate, or rather in a coordinated process leaves uncoordinated the antithetical demands of challenging complexity and simplistic appeal, representation and enactment (in other words: "nonacting through acting"), meaning and spectacle, contemplative detachment and psycho-physical involvement;[2] in short, the way opera bridges culture and nature often proved to be so effective in our history that it can rightly be held as a model in respect of analogous cultural formations down to rock concerts and spectacular sports events, the *thelos* of which is likewise to neutralize, even temporarily, the governing distinctions in everyday life between reality and fiction, authenticity and deceit, self and society, oneself and role (2002, xix, xxiii, 217).

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[1] "Human beings […] come most fully alive when there is a coalescence between a biologically grounded but heightened vitality and a spiritualized 'detachment' or 'disinterestedness. '" – writes Pfeiffer referring to John Dewey's 1934 *Art as Experience* (Pfeiffer 2002, xviii).

[2] "It seems difficult for Western cultures to leave the relations between the surface intensities of spectacles and the 'deeper' or 'higher' levels of either rationality or the affective life in a state of cognitive/affective dissonance, inconsistency, or simply indifference" (Pfeiffer 2002, 130). By comparison "Japanese culture, then, would appear as a side-by-side culture. Spectacular noise and elusive interiority, intellectual seriousness and grossest nonsense, elaborate formality and negligent looseness, stylishness, both traditional in the kimono and contemporary in the latest Western outfit, and stylistic incoherence or lack of style coexist in assigned places, but can also be adopted on what appears as the spur of the moment. Spectacles, to some extent, may be charged with vague symbolism. But one has to reckon also with an ultimate magnificent meaninglessness" (2002, 160). Concerning Japanese theatrical forms Pfeiffer stresses as crucial factor that "acting, role playing, 'imitation' (monomane), much as they are necessary and inevitable at a conventional but transitional stage, must disappear at some point. Technically and structurally, this is achieved by limiting role playing to the middle part, relativizing it by the emphasis on dance and music of the initial and later parts. The 'text' can take form and hold only after a musical conception has effectively materialized. Important as the text may be, it does not allow of a linguistic-poetic analysis in its own right. In such ways, a play without play(ing), that is, acting, may emerge" (2002, 147).

Pfeiffer widens our understanding of opera by locating its anthropological significance on a more global sphere through a masterful comparison to Japanese theatrical forms like Nō and Kabuki, and also to the martial art of Sumō (2002, 125–172). His account of the Kabuki theatre is instructive in terms of the European opera as well: "Kabuki spectacles thrive on the power and refinement of 'visual and aural delight.' Though never totally devoid of what Western terminology would describe as literary elements, the literary aspect is subordinated to 'theatrical effectiveness.' That means, for instance, that plays are tailored to suit the needs and special abilities of star actors, who must be interested in putting on a powerful show. […] the audience calls out during climactic pauses (*ma*) or poses (*mie*), a practice to some residual extent still known in Western opera. Audience response is stimulated by the extreme stylization of physical movement in a both vague and strong sense, however minimalized or even implicit it may be: visual, aural, codified, encoded, and varied during generations of actors' families. Audience response is triggered by and corresponds to levels of stylized exteriority connoting both crudely stereotyped and elusively spiritual sentiments. This institutionalized and open contact between actors (not plays) and audiences appears to be crucial" (2002, 131–132).

From the perspective of the public, Kabuki and Nō also demonstrates an intermittent emancipation or suspension of socioeconomic and political constraints (Pfeiffer 2002, 144). An ideal result of a play, properly characterized by the notion of "elaborate immediacy" (2002, 156), should be "the momentary fusion of quasi-transcendental contemplation and aesthetic effect, of concentration and openness, of increased and abandoned distance." Similarly to the Nietzschean notion of "great health," "the audience should feel *hana*, blossoming" (2002, 147). However, the minimum condition that triggers such an effect is not strictly decided: in the Japanese theatrical arts the staging of a work does not involve a representation of a full text, instead pieces and fragments can be presented as such, likewise in the Western practice of performing individual arias and other excerpts uprooted from whole operas (Pfeiffer 2002, 148).

Many of these features (priority of show over text based representation, stereotyped exteriority and spiritual sentiments, stardom and the suspension of everyday society, overstylization as elaborate immediacy, multisensory media, peak experiences, and immediate audience response) are also discussed in Lindenberger's excellent book, *Situating Opera* (2010), however he has some additional remarks as well. First, opera is not an authorial genre, but rather a temporal result of an ever-changing interplay of numerous co-creators. Secondly, the experience of an opera is a communal one that has to do with the much-discussed notion of "sublime," even with the magical and sacral (2010, 59–61, 138). Lastly, Lindenberger underscores that opera's exceptional intensity comes from its unquestionable musical basis that is directly connected to specific brain activity (2010, 115–138). Just like Pfeiffer, he too acknowledges that the operatic quality could be found in many derivative media forms, like movies, sports events, rock operas, and various quasi-operas.[3]

One of his examples for quasi-operas, or as he puts them: "not-quite-operas," is particularly interesting. He depicts a museum situation, not unfamiliar to those who have seen Marina Abramović's *The Artist Is Present* for instance: "Imagine entering a new, much-touted museum show entitled 'The Faust Project.' Although you are expecting something that evokes and/or represents some traditional images associated with the Faust legend, you are unprepared for an alienating combination of musical noises that you hear emanating from the room even before you enter. As you acclimate yourself to this new environment, you notice that what you took to be a museum guard is actually an actor playing a role in the show. […] Every quarter hour, a laser printer spews out a scientific paper on how some form of life, from birds and reptiles to human beings, can be cloned, and the actor then tacks these papers to the wall […]. In another corner one finds a display of early editions of texts on the Faust story, from the Faust Book to Goethe's dramatic poem and thence down to the versions by Paul Valéry and Thomas Mann. In the centre of the room there is a segment of a modern laboratory in which a life-size effigy of a scientist, dressed in sixteenth-century costume, holds a test tube marked 'Homunculus.' Inside the test tube is a glowing light that, in the course of a few minutes, turns into a bright jewel and ultimately into the shape of a human infant, after which it returns to the glowing light. Six video monitors, each with a different program, allow six different musical embodiments of the Faust story to blast away at once: Liszt's Faust Symphony; Berlioz's La Damnation de Faust; Gounod's Faust; Boito's Mefistofele; the second movement of Mahler's Eighth Symphony; and Busoni's Doktor Faust. […] All of those practices that we call the arts are in effect brought together in this room […]. These various arts in effect invade one another. The sounds of the musical versions of the Faust story, as well as of the interviews with scientists, make it difficult to concentrate on any single one. And these cacophonous sounds cause the viewing of the visual materials within the room to be difficult at best" (2010, 102–103).

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[3] What is more, Pfeiffer takes the view that "the continuing existence of opera in most Western societies hides the fact that its earlier cultural efficiency is nowadays overshadowed by rock music, or the overall effects of film, and probably sports events" (2002, 186–187). And Lindenberger does not disagree: "One might argue, to be sure, that certain films, for instance, those that cultivate advanced modes of visual and audial simulation, have come to rival opera in intensity. And one can speak as well of the communal experience in sports events, in which intensity is achieved through the suspense about a game's outcome and through the bonds created in the stadium by means of the enmity exercised toward the rival team. But the rock concert may well provide the closest analogy to the communal experience of opera. In both cases the audience senses a strong separation between the world of daily routine and the larger-than-life beings […] who perform before them" (2010, 60).

I do not have the space here to quote the text in its entirety, no matter how impressing the juxtapositions and contrasts of the aesthetic, medial, historical, and technical components are, that Lindenberger enumerates in order to picture the idea of a hybrid exhibition in which the most important fact is the violation of media borders. At the end of his description Lindenberger remarks: "You may wonder where and when this exhibition took place." Then reveals himself: "In fact, I have set up this scenario as a means of showing how opera might participate in a typically contemporary museum project in which all manner of borders are aggressively crossed" (2010, 104).

Lindenberger's fanciful idea on The Faust Project can be held as a justified instance of the "operatic" as long as we understand opera as a *principle* rather than a closed *genre*. Aiming to grasp the unique power of my examples from Godard and Greenaway to Gaillard and the Heineken spots, Lindenberger's suggestion seems perfectly appropriate. To me "operatic" proves to be a more apt, historically informed term for the phenomena discussed under the labels of "hybrid," "multimodal," "interart," and the like.

Beyond Opera

However we should not stop here, the long line from Monteverdi's early operas to the space operas of George Lucas and all the analogous "operatic" forms that could even passingly be linked to that line, are not capable to monopolize the site where intense aesthetic experience could occur. Pfeiffer, following the insights of eminent American pragmatists, John Dewey and Richard Shusterman, rightly pointed out that "the media of aesthetic experience extend throughout the realm of everyday life" (2002, xvii.) to appear "in ritual and sports, in parades, fireworks, and the media of popular culture, in bodily and domestic ornamentation, from primitive tattoos and cave drawings to contemporary cosmetics and interior decorating, and indeed in the countless colorful scenes and moving events which fill our cities and enrich our ordinary lives" (Shusterman 1992, 47).

And here is a point where we can easily get a link to another important culture analyst, Henry Jenkins, who devoted much of his research to such lowly genres, as wrestling, video games, comic strips, television series, pornography, horror cinema, and the like which are seemingly light years away from opera and its dignified milieu (Jenkins 1992; Jenkins 2002; Jenkins 2006; Jenkins 2007). To my knowledge, Jenkins has never written a page on opera, Japanese theatre or Sumō, but he did write on his beloved popular art forms from vaudeville to wrestling with a cultural anthropological approach very akin to Pfeiffer's. Furthermore, his accounts on the genres in question and his diagnosis on their therapeutic cultural role sound surprisingly similar to Pfeiffer's opinion on opera and Japanese theatre.

Jenkins's notorious term for the heightened aesthetic experience comes from the same register as his examples. "Wow" is the keyword referring to a "sense of wonderment, astonishment, absolute engagement." It "is something to be earned" (2007, 1). In *The Wow Climax* Jenkins recognizes many different cultural forms as wow-worthy, for my purpose here it is enough to refer to his statements on vaudeville and wrestling. His thoughts shed further light on the "operatic" discussed above.

Jenkins's succinct summary on vaudeville, that heavily draws on Gilbert Seldes's classic on the popular arts (Seldes [1924] 1957), would be applicable without substantial change to opera, Kabuki or rock concert and in a lesser degree to music video as well: "Vaudeville was not about telling stories; it was about putting on a show, and more than that, it was about each performer's individual attempt to stop the show and steal the applause. Vaudeville had little use for the trappings of theatrical realism; it was about the spectacular, the fantastic, and the novel. Vaudeville had little use for continuity, consistency, or unity; it was about fragmentation, transformation, and heterogeneity. […] The vaudeville program was constructed from modular units of diverse material, each no more than twenty minutes long. […] The entire art of vaudeville performance was structured around achieving that basic emotional impact" (Jenkins 2007, 4–5). Namely, it is the "wow climax."[4] Jenkins's account, which in many respects follows David

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[4] In Seldes's elaboration: "A moment comes when everything is exactly right, and you have an occurrence – it may be something exquisite or something unnameably gross; there is in it an ecstasy which sets it apart from everything else" (1957, 186).

Bordwell's train of thought on Hong Kong action movie (Bordwell 2000) and Tom Gunning's study on early cinema (Gunning 1986), stresses that the intense emotional impact is the focal point of the activities under investigation. The following characteristics, which are listed in his account (Jenkins 2007, 1–40), are also very familiar in the operatic milieu: momentariness, larger-than-life qualities,[5] technical virtuosity, wonderment, indeterminacy between narrative and non-narrative, and the demands of visceral rather than intellectual response.

Strange as it may seem, the above mentioned phrases are very accurate in terms of wrestling as well, which is characterized by Jenkins as a horrific hybrid or in-betweenness of sports and entertainment, theater and reality, blow off steam for working class and site of fandom for educated people, morality play and suppressed rebellion, masculine *tour de force* and latently feminine melodramatic series (2007, 60).[6] His cultural analysis draws upon Norbert Elias's theory on civilizing process (Elias 2000) and highlights the psychosocial compensatory nature of (even overtly aggressive) sports and spectacles (Elias and Dunning 1986). He is certainly right, however, Pfeiffer can provide further aspects that bring us back to opera and intermediality in general.

According to Pfeiffer, spectacles and "theatrical" quasi-sports events – such as Sumō, the Japanese form of wrestling in relation to which he concludes "the boundaries between fight and spectacular ceremonial are fluid" (2002, 151–152) – may gain an overwhelming cultural position due to the fact that certain historically relevant central cultural formations, in the Western world foremost the Greek tragedy and the Christian mass (Lindenberger 2010, 61; Pfeiffer 2002, 173–223), underwent a significant narrowing of their medial effects and capacities, while producing a development towards a bodiless interiority, and consequently drastically lessening the experiential range provided by them. Logical as Pfeiffer's conclusion may be, it is to the same extent non obvious: "the relationship [between mental and somatic cultural aspects] is drawn apart into extremes in literary interiority, on the one hand, and organized sports on the other" (2002, 120). Thus he complements the psychosocial argument with a medial one that sheds light on media dynamics from a historical perspective, which is the topic of my closing chapter.

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[5] An 1630 anonym treatise on opera comments: "it is obvious to every listener that ordinary people do not speak in music but instead plainly […] speaking in music therefore conforms more with our conceptions of superhuman characters than with our conception and manifest knowledge of everyday men, because harmonic discourse is higher, more masterful, sweeter, and more noble than everyday speech, we attribute it, by means of certain connate sense, to the more sublime and divine characters" (*Il corago*, translated and quoted in Tomlinson 1999, 24).

[6] Roland Barthes also compared WWF wrestling to plays of Moliere and Racine: "There are people who think that wrestling is an ignoble sport. Wrestling is not a sport, it is a spectacle, and it is no more ignoble to attend a wrestled performance of Suffering than a performance of the sorrows of Arnolphe or Andromaque" (Barthes 1982, 23).

Medial Therapies

Pfeiffer argues that the diverging tendencies toward the spectacular on one hand and the spiritual or literary on the other resulted in an urging demand for counteracting media trends that are able to reconcile again spiritual refinement with performativity and strong feelings. This counteraction is always a kind of therapy, psychosocial and medial at once, as it is most obvious in Wagner's concept of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* (Pfeiffer 2002, 127). Following Pfeiffer, I suggest using the word "operatic" to indicate the historical-medial side of these cultural dynamics. It also has to remind us of the etymological source of the word: that is the plural of the Latin *opus*; ergo "operatic" is a word indicating such cultural processes and means that can trigger or allow a heightened experience, and are characterized by plurality. Although the media are the foremost means of psychosocial self-therapy, their effects are far from being stable. From an anthropological point of view there is no direct association between any given medium and medial effect, and most importantly stability of effects cannot be ascribed to any medium (Pfeiffer 2002, xiii, 145). And this fact leads us to the aesthetics of reception, since it is evident that media phenomena are to be understood from the perspective of the audience. It also can be stated that the "operatic" media phenomena are the ones that can produce the most intensive, powerful, and balanced combined effects of the conflicting cultural tendencies that are discussed in Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht's influential book, *Production of Presence* (2004) under the labels of "presence" and "meaning." However, the accumulated aesthetic effects provided by plural cultural formations (i.e. "operas" in the broadest sense) are extremely temporal and turn into entropy in an intermittent way. The term "inter-media" indicates in itself this temporality: "media" refers to something that is in-between, while "inter" also refers to a state of in-betweenness. However in the first case we have something that operates in a socially encoded way, while in the second case this operation lacks conventionality, or at least suspends the social, psychological, and cultural pressures. Thus media as such possess the ability to mediate in an organized cultural context, while "inter" refers to a transitional state where such ability not only exponentially increases but is also counteracted by the suspension of a consensual mediation.

Thus, media can be not only the subject but also the object of a therapy. “Hair of the dog” – as the saying goes; that is media have to perform their own self-therapy, the paradigmatic model of which became the birth of the European opera in Italy at the turn of the 16th century. It occurred as a medial treatment exercised on verbal theatre that was considered powerless (Pfeiffer 2002, 182–183). The aim of the Camerata in Florence was to revitalize the language of poetry by enriching it with its forgotten musical qualities. The point of this medial therapy is very easy to understand if we consider the much circulating late-renaissance gnostic writings like *The Corpus Hermeticum* that influenced the initial ideas of the resuscitating of Greek tragedy. Here is an excerpt from the 16th chapter: “Turned into our own native tongue, the sermon (logos) keepeth clear the meaning of the words (logoi) [at any rate]. For that its very quality of sound, the [very] power of the Egyptian names, have in themselves the bringing into act of what is said. As far as, then, thou canst, O King – (and thou canst [do] all things) – keep [this] our sermon from translation; in order that such mighty mysteries may not come to the Greeks, and the disdainful speech of Greece, with [all] its looseness, and its surface beauty, so to speak, take all the strength out of the solemn and the strong – the energetic speech of Names. The Greeks, O King, have novel words, energic of ‘argumentation’ [only]; and thus is the philosophizing of the Greeks – the noise of words. But we do not use words; but we use sounds full-filled with deeds” (The Definitions of Asclepius unto King Ammon. In *Corpus Hermeticum*, 267). The statements on the Greeks characterized as disdainful and superficial in this text may seem contradictory to the Florentine intentions towards resuscitating Greek tragedy, or more precisely the culture of *mousikē* (Murray and Wilson 2004), but the misunderstanding can be avoided if we recognize that in the context of the early opera Egyptian magical language stands for the lost power of Greek tragedy.

The initial operatic therapy can be seen as a striving for a powerful and spiritual spectacle that is able to neutralize the opposition of representation and deed, or meaning and presence in the Gumbrechtian terms. Do not forget: opera was accidental, however the kind of media-accident opera exemplifies is far from being accidental, rather a necessity. The thesis of media-intermittency reads as follows: “anthropologically, the most ‘occasionalist’ [or the most *intermittent* – in my wording] media and forms of art are the most durable” (Pfeiffer 2002, 189). What is more, we could say that the intermittency that characterizes many Western hybrid media configurations from Spanish *fiestas*, through British *court masques* to the American vaudeville or WWF wrestling is one of the main features and drivers of the Western media dynamics. Media do perform self-therapies from time to time, but these treatments never prove to be final. Pfeiffer warns about the fragility of opera and its "intermittent collapse" (2002, 222), he also shows Kabuki's transient nature from the public's perspective,[7] and in general "the potential instability of 'aesthetic' effects [that] are not rooted in some stable or generalized significance" (2002, 161).

Here is a question: what might be the causes of the media dynamics that I am referring to here as "intermittency?" I believe, three possible answers offer themselves. The first comes from the argumentation Marshall McLuhan set up stressing the basic human need for awe and wonder: "The crossings or hybridizations of the media release great new force and energy as by fission or fusion. […] The fact that they do interact and spawn new progeny has been a source of wonder over the ages" (McLuhan 1994, 48–49). Media can produce the expected psychophysical energy only in newer and newer configurations. However, these always tend to reproduce the oppositions of heightened (literary) complexity and spectacular yet often boring performativity, like the division between *opera seria* and *opera buffa*, or *grand opera* and *operetta*, or modern novel and cinema.[8]

The second answer could also be derived from McLuhan's theses: it stresses the Western pressure for innovation, which is a consequence of a pervasive conception of history as progression. Hybridisation of media thus could be understood as a terrain of innovation that results in aesthetic shock effects that are highly exposed to quick inflation (Bürger 1984, 15–34).

And lastly, the third answer focuses on the historical origin of the shocking aesthetics of medial hybrids, which is Romanticism. It substituted the age-old artistic principle of *mimēsis* (imitation) with a new principle of expression warranted by the genius himself who is not bound by the rules or limitations of any genre or medium. As Schiller writes in his 22nd *Letters upon the Aesthetic Education of Man* (1795): "In every art, the perfect style consists in the knowledge how to remove specific barriers, while not canceling at the same time the individual advantages of the art, and how to give it a more general character by a wise use of what belongs to it specially."[9] Romanticism initiated an aesthetics of transgression that played out its cards not only in terms of shocking subjects or revolutionary political intentions but also in terms of dissolving the dichotomies between one art and the other, art and technology, art and life, and the like.

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[7] "[Kabuki] is not solidly anchored in some larger, coherent cultural context. If its spectacular potential is more directly powerful, it is equally unstable, liable to be lost or regained in rather haphazard fashions" (2002, 149).

[8] A phrase from Robert Warshow's *The The Immediate Experience* (2001 [1962], xli) proves to be illuminating in respect to both the insufficient and compensatory character of our modernity: "I have not brought Henry James to the movies or the movies to Henry James, but I hope I have shown that the man who goes to the movies is the same as the man who reads James."

The examples of necessarily intermittent aesthetics of transgression go on and on and have long ceased being confined to the areas of art in its narrow sense.[10] Pfeiffer recalls for instance the theatrical ideas of Brecht who spoke of theatre "as a sports institution,"[11] and here, if I had the adequate space, I would analyse the way Franc Roddam in his chapter of *Aria* tries to cure and make Wagner's *Liebestod digestible for the MTV Generation* by impressive cinematography, music video cut, and filmic narration (Citron 2010, 63–76) and also the way Godard, in the same movie, interpolates modern body-building and baroque operatic yearning into each other in an experimental way (Cook 1998, 215–254), or again the way Heineken Italia in its 2010 Cannes Media Gold Lion commercial spot *Auditorium* stages the rivalry between highbrow arts and football, bringing out a musically and theatrically heightened football broadcast as winner in an extraordinary witty documentary style, and also the way Heineken continues this track in the 2011/12 UEFA Champions League football season campaign that displays legendary football players in opulent opera interiors promoting football as a contemporary incarnation of that reputable art form. I would also analyse the way Cyprian Gaillard and the composer and former opera singer, Koudlam at a memorable part of their dystopic "electronic opera" *Desniansky Raion* create a strange, delicate, and fragile in-betweenness of different genres such as historical painting, *tableau vivant*, amateur documentary film and music video showing scenes of street fight between adversary gangs of football hooligans. And lastly I would indulge myself in Peter Greenaway's peerless masterpiece, *The Cook, The Thief, His Wife and Her*

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[9] "Darin eben zeigt sich der vollkommene Stil in jeglicher Kunst, dass er die spezifischen Schranken derselben zu entfernen weiß, ohne doch ihre spezifischen Vorzüge mit aufzuheben, und durch eine weise Benutzung ihrer Eigentümlichkeit ihr einen mehr allgemeinen Charakter erteilt." Friedrich Schiller, *Über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen, in einer Reihe von Briefen,* 1795, S. 44. *http://www2.ibw.uni-heidelberg.de/~gerstner/Schiller_Aesthetische_Erziehung.pdf* - my translation. Last accessed 23. 09. 2014.

[10] That is why Pfeiffer prefers the term *media* over *the arts* that always produced in its cultural and conceptual history such dichotomies as *high arts* and *popular arts, arts* and *crafts*, *autonomous arts* and *applied arts*, etc. (Pfeiffer 2002, xiv).

[11] "His slogan of the 'theater as a sports institution' or as sports itself starts from the diagnosis that people do not have fun in the theater because they go there for the wrong reasons. They are not geared – and neither are most plays and theatrical productions themselves – to the 'fascinating reality' that the sports arena produces or 'stages,' especially, for Brecht, in boxing" (Pfeiffer 2002, 150).

Lover, in which he treats feature film in an ambitious way: that of the opera using pompous, over-stylized staging, to be more precise: processional staging, excessive, operatic subject, fascinating costumes by Jean-Paul Gaultier, *tableaux vivants*,[12] sequences edited similarly to a music video, musical *leitmotivs*, castrato-like aria (composed by Michael Nyman), and some not less virtuoso "post-operatic" oral utterances (including belch, munching, and all the noises you can imagine around a majestically-laid banquet table) brilliantly performed by Michael Gambon and his co-actors. It is important to notice: the unusual interplay of the above mentioned components do not help but hinder the narrative development, rendering Greenaway's film more image- and music-centered than plot-based (Turi 2010) and his usage of music suggests throughout a highly operatic belief that the noblest ideas and feelings are not communicable via verbal language, only by music.[13]

At the beginning I promised analyses of the works mentioned above, more precisely I have already indicated that these analyses will not be performed. Instead, I tried to delineate an intellectual framework in which these analyses could be implemented. However, it seems to me worthwhile to raise the question, whether it is a more appropriate and rewarding treatment of these artworks if they are scrutinized by close readings and refined interpretations or if it is better for our cultural welfare to leave them to exert their (presence) effects on us without any distancing gesture. I am inclined to leave this question open.

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[12] The whole scenery of the scenes in the restaurant dining room is derived from Frans Hals's picture, *The Banquet of the Officers of the St George Militia Company in 1616*, a wall-sized reproduction of what is visible at all times in the background.

[13] It is not surprising if we consider that *The Cook…* is his last direction before he started writing his ten opera libretti in the early 90s. Zita Turi notes that "Greenaway's attraction to the Renaissance and Baroque is widely known: the late Renaissance and more notably the Baroque were periods in which the arts were united by intermediality. This included the fusion of visual, audible and written mediums, which competed with, yet also complemented one another and Greenaway considers opera to be the most outstanding example of this artistic synthesis. In his films, such as *The Cook, The Thief, His Wife and Her Lover*, music is fundamental to the film narrative and the tunes resemble, on the one hand, operas and, on the other hand, they imitate medieval liturgical songs and psalms" (Turi, 2010).

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Intermediality between Games and Fiction: The "Ludology vs. Narratology" Debate in Computer Game Studies: A Response to Gonzalo Frasca

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Abstract: In the last ten or fourteen years there has been a debate among the so called ludologists and narratologists in Computer Games Studies as to what is the best methodological approach for the academic study of electronic games. The aim of this paper is to propose a way out of the dilemma, suggesting that both ludology and narratology can be helpful methodologically. However, there is need for a wider theoretical perspective, that of semiotics, in which both approaches can be operative. The semiotic perspective proposed allows research in the field to focus on the similarities between games and traditional narrative forms (since they share narrativity to a greater or lesser extent) as well as on their difference (they have different degrees of interaction); it will facilitate communication among theorists if we want to understand each other when talking about games and stories, and it will lead to a better understanding of the hybrid nature of the medium of game. In this sense the present paper aims to complement Gonzalo Frasca's reconciliatory attempt made a few years back and expand on his proposal.[1]

Keywords: intermediality, ludology, narratology, semiotics, stories, computer games, gameplay, God-games.

The rapid development of digital technologies and the widespread use of computers are signs of radical changes in life, especially in popular culture and entertainment. As a result of the spectacular growth of computer games in culture, a shift in entertainment patterns has been observed. It seems that more and more people show a preference for playing electronic games[2] over watching movies or TV, reading books, or listening to music. As recent research statistics show [Fig. 1] (The NPD group, 2013), the percentage of computer games users has risen significantly compared to the other, more traditional forms of entertainment, such as movies, TV series, recorded or live music.

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[1] A similar and slightly different paper is under publication in Greek in the *Proceedings of the 10th International Conference of Semiotics: Changing Worlds and Signs of the Times* [*Κόσμοι που αλλάζουν, Σημεία των καιρών*], eds. Maria Papadopoulou and Eleftheria Deltsou, Volos, Greece.

Similar reports e.g. from the Entertainment Software Association (ESA) provide statistics that dissolve the myth that computer games "are just for kids," or they are "about shooting aliens." According to the ESA report the average age of the videogame player is 30 years, whereas interesting figures are presented in findings about the gender and age range of players: 32% of users are under 18, 32% have an age ranging from 18 to 35, while an impressive 36% designates players above 36 years old. Another interesting demographic is that the gender of players is divided between 55% for men and 45% for women, but women over 18 represent a greater percentage (31%) compared to boys under 17, which is only 19% [Fig. 2] (*http://www.theesa.com/facts/pdfs/ESA_EF_2013.pdf*).

Such statistics reveal a shift in entertainment patterns and point to the spectacular rise of a cultural phenomenon, the growing popularity of computer games, a fact that has not escaped the attention of cultural critics. Indeed, the map of media studies in the academy has changed since Computer Games Studies has been established as an autonomous field of study in higher education, with New Departments being set up in European and North American Universities, World or International Conferences about Computer Games being organized, and relevant academic journals being published.

Espen Aarseth, one of the pioneers in the field, entitled his article "Computer Games Studies, Year 1" (2001b), thus inaugurating officially the study of Computer Games as an independent and legitimate academic discipline. Henry Jenkins (2000) declared Computer Games to be "the art form of the digital age" that deserves the same kind of critical attention given so far to the traditional art forms of the 20th century. Roy Shuker (1995), even more enthusiastically, considers computer games "a major cultural form" and predicts that they "may well soon replace cinema, cable and broadcast television as the dominant cultural form." Finally, Jesper Juul (2000) remarks that although we still "have not seen the first videogame Shakespeare or Bach," yet "the speed with which videogames have developed aesthetically, formally and functionally, is remarkable." (All the above critics are cited in Newman 2004, 2.)

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[2] The use of the terms computer games, videogames, or electronic games is equivalent; therefore they are used interchangeably.

However, on the research level there has been observed an animosity between two rival groups of critics, resulting in an almost ten-year long and on-going debate over the most appropriate methodological approach for the study of computer games: on the one hand, the so-called narratologists (or narrativists)[3] find affinities between computer games and the traditional storytelling arts and approach games for their narrative dimension; on the other hand, the ludologists[4] focus attention on the mechanics of the functions of computer games and reject an analysis of computer games as narratives. Their basic argument is that the story elements in a game, if any, are of no real importance, as the gamer is the least interested in them; his or her main concern being with gameplay itself, namely how to win the game. Narratologists, on the other hand admit that some games have nothing to do with stories, but the most popular ones, those that are launched in the market as blockbusters,[5] have a strong narrative element or share common characteristics with Hollywood blockbusters, and as a result they go about researching aspects of visual representation, the notion of movement, narrative space and time, character narrativity, animation techniques, etc. (King and Krzywinska 2002, 3).

This theoretical clash, which has been going on for quite some time now, seems to have been triggered by the radical, and sometimes extreme positions held on the camp of ludologists who feared that the newly established discipline of computer game studies would be overwhelmed by a neo-colonial discourse and could be annexed as a subfield of English, Literature, or Media Studies. Hence Aarseth's early plea in his article (2001b) to let Computer Game Studies flourish as an autonomous and independent academic field, and be free from any colonization attempts by scholars with a background in Humanities, Cultural, or Media Studies. Markku Eskelinen (2001) went a step further in making an overtly polemical comment that "in the best cases stories in videogames are just uninteresting elements or gift wrappings to games," which was quoted by Rune Klevjer, and then by three other commentators, adding to the animosity between the two rival camps. Commenting on the difference between games and narrative, Richard Rouse said that "What a player primarily seeks in the gaming experience is the challenge they offer, his/her total immersion in the gameplay, the need for action and not simply to watch. […] The player demands more interaction with the game, while the narrative parts are tiresome" (2003, 2–13). Concerning the issue of interaction, not only Rouse, but also Chris Crawford, as well as Loftus and Loftus, reached the extreme position equating response to narrative with passivity as opposed to the active role of player in interaction with games. Loftus and Loftus's statement on interactivity is characteristic: "When reading a narrative or watching a movie the reader/spectator follows the fantasy of the story passively, whereas the player in computer games undertakes a more energetic role in the gameworld" (1983, 41).

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[3] Michael Mateas (2002, 32) suggests the term narrativist for the new narratologists who study digital based narratives and thus computer games to distinguish them from the classic narratologists (Barthes, Todorov, Genette, Greimas, Metz, Prince) whose theories had appeared long before the advent of computer games.

[4] From the latin "ludus," meaning play controlled by rules. Gonzalo Frasca (2003) explains how the term came to be first used in the 3rd International conference on Digital Art and Culture at Brown University (2001) in reference to the keynote speakers Eskelinen, Juul, and Frasca and since then it has been adopted to denote researchers in electronic/digital/computer game studies.

[5] To give an indication, only 5% of the 6000 games produced and circulated in the global market every year achieve commercial success (King and Krzywinska 2002, 8). But they have the greatest sales, dominating the game market.

In an attempt to bridge the theoretical schism Gonzalo Frasca (2003) wrote a reconciliatory article entitled "Ludologists love stories too: notes from a debate that never took place," as a sort of apology for the hard-line radicalism of his colleagues and in order to explain that the so-called debate between narratologists and ludologists is the result of some misconceptions and misunderstandings. Therefore he urges his readers to consider this debate as never really have taken place. Nowhere in the ludologists' publications, he claims, there is any evidence of an intention to downgrade narrative or to disparage narratologists. He simply expressed the ludologists' belief that in computer games it is not story but gameplay which has central role, and therefore approaching computer games study from the perspective of game theory is a viable methodology which they are not inclined to abandon. As for the extreme and radical positions, like that expressed by Eskelinen, Frasca tried to explain it away saying that no offence was intended by the Finnish ludologist and that his statement was misconstrued.

The aim of this article[6] will be to complement Frasca's reconciliatory purpose, moving past the surface debate level to address the core of the problem. Endorsing his constructivist spirit we will have to agree that the so-called Narratology vs. Ludology Dilemma is a false one and that this debate will have to be resolved, as it is of no help to the cause of establishing Computer Games Study as an autonomous and independent academic field. We will accept that this debate came about due to misunderstandings and misconceptions, as it usually happens in the beginning of a new phenomenon, like the appearance of computer games on the cultural scene. And we will have to agree that the theoretical chasm between researchers, scholars and critics must be bridged, if we want to understand each other when talking about games and stories and, above all, if we want to comprehend games as a new cultural and popular art form.

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[6] The present article is the result of an earlier study in Greek, Kokonis (2010, 338–401). In this study an attempt is made to deal with the cultural phenomenon of computer games in the digital age and a critical stance is expressed to Frasca's position. Also a more specific proposal to overcome the methodological dilemma in Computer Game Studies has been presented in the 10th International Conference of Semiotics (see Note 1 above), which is under publication.

Overcoming the rivalry between the theoretical camps, after the necessary concessions are made from each side, will not suffice however, as long as the methodological problem is not resolved. Placing computer games in an intermedial context it becomes apparent that we are dealing with a new cultural form that is largely based on digital technologies. As a result, it is a hybrid form that seems to combine elements from the more traditional art forms with new traits that derive from its digital technological base. If we just for a moment consider how computer games utilize the computer screen, the nature and extent of this hybridity will become apparent. In the sense expressed by Bolter and Grusin, computer games employ the videogame screen both as a means of immediacy and hypermediacy: on one hand the screen is transparent, guiding our view like a window inside the gameworld and facilitating immersion in it; on the other it becomes hypermedial, dividing its surface into various parts that function as multiple channels of communication and interaction with the user, as the game's principal means of interface. Thus computer games remediate the screen of other media in the following ways:

a) As a monitor: computer games borrow the function of the screen from surveillance systems especially in the category of shoot them up games, where the player, as some kind of guard, surveys the space before him and shoots up any intruders.

b) From live TV: computer games borrow the function of TV live transmission and remediate it in games played in real time.

c) From the Cinema Screen: Ever since the development of 3D graphics, computer games have acquired the narrative function of cinematic images, borrowing realistic representation and movement from the cinema screen, so that the gamer has the possibility of immersion in the fictional gameworld, while at the same time the intricate interface allows the player to interact physically with the game's interface (gameplay).

d) From the world of computers: Computer games borrow the metaphor of the desktop, incorporating in the game veritable computer traits such as top-down menus, page scrolling, hypertext buttons, etc. (2000, 88–94).

Thus, computer games studies is a relatively new and uncharted critical territory precisely because it is based on digital technology. If we approach the subject with interest and without prejudice, we may discover that the theoretical tools of the past are not as reliable in research as we used to think. Perhaps, both narratologists and ludologists should reconsider that neither narratology nor ludology alone are sufficient for the study of the phenomenon. What is needed is a wider, more flexible theoretical grid that it would incorporate both the narratology and the ludology perspectives, as well as other theoretical tools, for the comprehensive study of computer games. I would suggest semiotics to be used as an umbrella theory scheme which would allow for a revision of the narratological aspect of story in computer games, as well as the application of ludology for the role of the play and game element in the structures of gameplay and an assessment of the user's interaction with the game. In this way, we could arrive at a better understanding of the nature of play in computer games and comprehend them as a cultural form of expression.

Some Preliminary Notes and Concessions

I would like to begin with some observations or minor objections to certain points made in Frasca's article. First, considering the use of the terms "ludologist" and "ludology," I would suggest that these terms should be thought in a wider sense than what ludologists envision them today. The term "ludologist" should not be limited to exclusively designate the researcher who explores the mechanism of the computer games. It should be extended to cover the research of games in general, whether traditional or contemporary, old or new, analog or digital. Similarly the term "ludology," ditto, should not be limited or be a synonym for the study of electronic games. The definition of "ludology" given by Frasca (1999) as "the study of games in general and of videogames in particular," which is not different than the first definition of the term tabulated in the electronic journal *Game Research.com* as "the study of games, particularly of computer games," offers the margins for a wider sense of the term. I find objectionable, though, the second definition of the term provided by *Game Reseearch.com*: "Ludology is often defined as the study and function (gameplay) of games, in contrast to the study of games as narratives or the study of games as a visual medium."[7] There are games that function as narratives, or at least narrative is a vital part of their structure. Besides, practically all games work thanks to their graphic representation (computer graphics). Therefore, such a definition is limiting and simplistic. To establish Ludology as an academic discipline it would require a broadening of its scope for both the synchronic and diachronic study of all kinds of play and game, taking recourse to the tenets of classical Play and Game Theory as expressed by the pioneers in the field, e.g. Huizinga, Caillois, Avedon and Smith, and others. It is already encouraging the fact that Markku Eskelinen has expressed the need to draw on classical Play and Game Theory in his essay "The Gaming Experience" (2001, n.p.).

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[7] See: *http://game-research.com/index.php/dictionary/.* Last accessed 15. 10. 2013.

Secondly, I think that Ludologists need not to barricade themselves behind radical or extreme positions, because within the rhetoric of a polemical discourse the real target of research, that is, what is the nature of computer games, what are their inherent characteristics, what is the way or the degree of their user's interaction with them, might go amiss. As several commentators have pointed out, Computer Games Studies is at its initial stage of research, and the first, timid steps are now being made towards the medium's specificity. Newman for example, has defined five basic elements as computer games' inherent characteristics: graphics, sound, interface, gameplay, and story (2004, 10–11). If narratologists set out to explore the narrative dimension of a game with story, as its starting point in their approach, and ludologists respectively focus on gameplay to discuss the gaming experience, there remain three other traits that could very well require a different theoretical approach: theories of representation, aesthetics or perception for computer graphics; theories about the transmission and reception/function of sound for the audio aspect of games; and theories of the new digital media for the issue of interactivity regarding the interface/mode of communication of the games with their user. These are all good reasons why a broader and wider theoretical scheme is necessary to accommodate all of the particular theoretical approaches, giving the opportunity to researchers with a different theoretical background and expertise to contribute to this affair.

I will return to this issue shortly with a more specific proposal, but at the moment I would like to voice some thoughts concerning the camp of narratologists. Given that computer games are not experienced as narratives in the way that novels, movies, and TV series are, I think it fit to suggest that narratologists should also make the concession that some other theoretical perspective, other than narratology, could be welcome in Computer Games Studies. Besides, narratologists should respect Aarseth's request to abstain from any imperialistic attempt to colonize the subject as a part of literary, cinema, or media studies. Already King and Krzywinska, in the introduction to the volume *ScreenPlay* that they have co-edited, declare their intention to examine only games with a distinct narrative dimension and to focus on the common elements games share with cinema. They emphatically state that "this is not designed to be an 'imperialist' enterprise, seeking to claim the relatively unsettled territory of games largely or exclusively for film-oriented approaches" (2002, 3).

Finally, why not reverse the tables and claim that ludology (in the wider sense proposed above) could become a useful tool for the study of literary and cinematic narratives? The affinity between play and fiction has been pointed out by scholars and critics in the past who observe that many literary texts have a playful character. Indicatively, I refer to some titles in the relevant bibliography that demonstrate such an affinity: Hutchinson, P. (1983) *Games Authors Play* (Methuen); Detweiler, R. (1976) "Games and Play in Modern American Fiction" *Contemporary Literature*, XVII: 45–62; Bruss, E. (1977) "The Game of Literature and Some Literary Games" *New Literary History*, 9: 153–72. The play element in fiction can be found on various levels: at the level of style, e.g. in poems with rhymes, puns, metaphors, etc. Any text by Nabokov is notorious for its language games. Also in terms of plot, especially in detective fiction, the antagonism between author and reader is more than obvious regarding the discovery or not of the criminal before closure. Mostly the element of play and game is obvious in intertextuality, i.e. in texts where the emphasis does not lay in the relationship of the text with the external world, but in the relationship with other fictional texts. We are then talking about cases of metafiction in which the author's aim is not simply to create a story but to offer additional commentary on the nature of the narrative text and on narrative conventions. In the comparative study of my Ph.D Thesis entitled "Metafictional Games: The Play Element in Cinema and the Novel" (1991), which was written much before there was any concern with the study of computer games, the aim was precisely to consider the role of play or game both in literary metafiction texts (e.g. Kurt Vonnegut, Jr, John Barth, William Gass, John Fowles, Raymond Federman, Donald Barthelme, Vladimir Nabokov, Italo Calvino, and others), as well in cinematic texts (e.g. Alfred Hitchcock, Jean Luc Goddard, Francois Truffaut, Frederico Fellini, Brian DePalma, Woody Allen, Richard Rush, Mel Brooks, and others). Play and Game Theory proved instrumental in examining the relationship between authors and their texts or readers/viewers and their texts. I bring up this piece of information just to show that both narratology and ludology do not exclude one another, but instead can combine in the study of texts, including videogames as texts.

Semiotics as a Viable Methodology Tool

I take the chance now to make a specific proposal about semiotics that will provide a wider theoretical framework. But before I suggest a particular semiotic model for the study of games, an answer is needed for the question "why semiotics?" From a purely pragmatic point of view, what the gamer faces on the screen before him or her is just some shapes, colours, designs, objects, and movements. Playing the game means assigning some meaning to each one of them, configuring them out, which means treating them as signs that need interpretation. In combination to each other, then these lead to further signs, which also need interpretation, as part of an on-going process in the semiotic chain of signs, what C. S. Pierce calls a spiral of semiosis. When approaching a computer game through a semiotic perspective, we observe that meaning derives or is produced by the process of signs that, when interpreted, induce the gamer to further action. The game as text then offers itself up for examination as a field "where interpretation and action must always be seen as living in a closely co-ordinated working relationship since signs are both the result and the ground of all kinds of action" (Compagnio and Coppock 2009, 8).

Semiotics has not been applied in Computer Game Studies until recently, either because computer games is a relatively new cultural form, or because members of the international semiotic community initially thought that the hybrid, technologically based computer games would not comprise a de facto object of study as do the more traditional literary or audiovisual texts that structural semiotics had taught us to treat as texts. Nevertheless, some semioticians believe that given the appropriate semiotic model computer games too could be subject to semiotic analysis, as Compagnio and Coppock of the Italian semiotic Association suggest in the new semiotic journal *E/C Journal* (2009). The model of semiotics they propose offers a new perspective for the examination of contemporary cultural forms and tendencies, as it is based on a conception of semiotics, "more pragmatic and modern," that derives from "a plane or level of analysis that seeks 'immanent,' hermeneutic traces or structures" in the relation of the semiotic text with the interactive, perceptual, and hermeneutic functions and practices of its user (Compagnio and Coppock 2009, 6). In short their brand of semiotics offers "a framework that builds on a dynamic distinction between text and practice" (2009, 2).

On the other side of the Atlantic American scholars have been active in researching semiotic systems for application in computer games studies. Most notable is the work of David Myers, who is said to have worked on the semiotics for computer games longer than anyone else. Myers focuses his research on computer games language and the aesthetics of computer games in a manner analogous to that of Russian formalists who defined literariness in literary works.

However, it seems to me that the semiotic model of "text vs. practice" proposed by the Italian semioticians is more amenable for the study of computer games. It offers a wider theoretical framework that allows for the involvement of partial theoretical approaches, e.g. narratological, ludologist, or other, in the analysis of computer games' inherent characteristics. At the same time it is a pragmatic framework, since by focusing on the relation between the text and its user, offers the appropriate perspective to assess key theoretical issues such as narrativity or interaction, which mark any similarities or differences existing between computer games viewed as texts with the more traditional narrative texts.

God-Games: A Case Study

More specifically, of the various games genres (action, adventure, sports, simulations, puzzle games, role-playing games, etc.) we could single out computer strategy games, which according to the ESA report are of the most popular (39%), to use as case study for the application of the semiotic model "text vs. practice." Particularly the games combining simulation with strategic action with four basic aims of the type 4x (eXplore, eXpand, eXploit, eXterminate), which develop on turn-based moves on a map but combine real-time tactics and provide the player with a point of view from above, enabling him to control the world of the gameplay (thus the name God-Games), are the best games for a case study.

We could have chosen action games like *Max Payne* (Remedy/God Games 2001) or games like the *Die Hard* trilogy (Probe, Fox Interactive 1996), obviously a franchise of the respective film series, where the narrative dimension is more obvious, with a distinct story taking a central role and being followed faithfully during gameplay. But games of simulation and strategy like *Command and Conquer* (Electronic Arts, 1999), or *Sid Meyers' Civilization* series (Microprose 1989, 1996, Infogrames 2001, 2KGames 2005), comprise a category where the narrative dimension is not prominent, as the purpose in such games is the development of a people or nation (economic, political, military) in antagonism with rival nations, where the player achieving absolute hegemony becomes the winner. Unlike action games that are plot-driven with main characters and a protagonist-hero, in God Games the hero is the map itself, that is, the game-text that the player has to traverse from one territory to the next until all provinces and countries are conquered and the player is proclaimed absolute ruler.

A typical example of a game combining simulation and strategy is *Rome: Total War*^{TM} (Sega/Activision, The Creative Assembly, 2004) (to be referred to as *RTW* from now on). It is a simulation, as every time it is played, a new version of History of Hellenistic and Early Roman times is recreated (270 BC to 14AD). At the same time it is a strategy turn-based game with real-time battle action. There is not a particular story determining the flow and evolution of the game, other than the historical evolution and progress of a faction the player plays with. Finally, the story that is created by the player's moves at the game's closure is the historical account of a small city-state of the antiquity from its humble beginnings to its gradual development into an immense empire stretching around the Mediterranean. History is being (re-) written with a capital H. In fact, the game's structure provides 9 factions (17 if the player mods the game) to compete against each other, which gives this game a great flexibility, so that it is not always the glory of Rome that is recreated in the simulation of historical reality. Instead the player may choose to lead any of Alexander the Great's successors, such as Kassander of Macedonia, the Seleucids of Antioch, the Ptolemies of Egypt, or even Hannibal of Carthage, the Gauls, the Parthians, or the Dacians for that matter, producing a counterfactual historiography. In this sense, the game is similar to *Close Combat II: A Bridge Too Far* (Microsoft 1996), which is a real-time strategic war-game, simulating a counterfactual historiography by "rewriting the History of the Second World War to the advantage of Nazi Germany" (Atkins 2003, 2).

I am not going to engage in a full analysis of RTW's game text. Instead I will simply try to illustrate how its signs are deciphered in the on-going chain of spiral semiosis and how the semiotic brand of "text vs. practice" opens up the text for examination through divergent theoretical approaches e.g. from a narratological, or ludic perspective, etc. For this purpose I am going to cite from one screenshot of a game that was in progress, a "page" so to speak from the game text. As shown in Fig. 3, the player has chosen to lead the Carthaginians, who seem to be winning in the game. The screenshot in Fig. 3 depicts the Campaign Map of Greece, as the current theatre of operations, in its main section (Section A from now on), and the bottom part is divided into three more sections: Section B which shows the entire ancient world with all of its 103 provinces; in the middle bottom section, Section C a full Carthaginian army is presented with three generals and several military units including hoplites, war elephants, archers, and cavalry; and finally in the right bottom part, Section D there are icons that work as hypertextual buttons as part's the game's intricate interface. All four Sections of the screenshot are replete with signs which may signify individually or in combination with each other, not only within their section, but through all sections. To explain their mode of signification I will rely on the Piercian tri-partied semiotic model, whereby each sign has three aspects: the iconic, the indexical, and the symbolic. For example, in the geophysics map of Section A, we notice some parts of the Greek mainland, as well as parts up north in the Balkans, where mountains are snow-capped; this climate detail is conveyed through the iconic aspect of the sign. In addition, this sign relates to the icon of a snowflake in Section D, which is a sign signifying also the season through its symbolic aspect.

Signs can be meaningful in various ways. Some signs, and the aspects thereof, may pertain to the representation mode; others may relate to story, or gameplay; there are signs that are functional, like the snowflake icon above, as parts of the game's interface; finally, others may pertain to the auditory part of the game, for instance its music, speech parts, or sound effects. (Every time there is an update report in the form of a top-down scroll of the faction's treasury, the clinging of coins is heard.) To give a satisfactory and comprehensive account of the ways signs communicate meaning, we will need to employ Roland Barthes's five narrative codes: the hermeneutic, the proairetic, the semic, the cultural or referential code, and the symbolic code (S/Z 1970, 17–18). Signs with an iconic aspect are usually interpreted with the cultural or referential code, often in combination with the hermeneutic or the proairetic code, and thus pertain to the representational mode, to the story or the gameplay: in Section A, the Greek peninsula, with its mountains, plains, cities, ports, parts of Asia Minor, the Aegean and Ionian seas, war ships, commercial vessels, the Greek cities of Corinth, Athens, Larissa, Thermon, Apollonia, Thessaloniki, Pergamum, etc. are easily recognizable and knowable from our storehouse of prior knowledge. The same applies to iconic aspects of signs in Section B (we recognize countries, areas, seas, etc.) and similarly we comprehend the army with its generals, the military units, with their uniforms, equipment, etc. in Section C. Through the symbolic code we read the 3d sculpture representation of Zeus in Olympia, in the Peloponnese, as a sacred site, as well the half-moon in the white banners of the Carthaginian armies, with the indexical aspect of the sign signifying a full army when the white turns to grey. The white banners of Carthaginians signify as an index of their presence in foreign territories, contributing to the hermeneutic code that explains their actions: so they have conquered most of the west, including Rome, and are now heading (proairetic code) towards capturing the rest of the Greek Cities. Such information conveyed by the signs are vital both to the development of the story, and to the gameplay. The full army designated by the icon of the soldier carrying the grey flag is lead by the general Thero Ibera. We gather this piece of information by relating the iconic sign of his portrait in Section B, in combination with the legend "Thero Ibera" in Section D. The green colour extending from the Peloponnese up to Macedonia, is the indexical aspect of the sign related to the same general, who is advancing on the way from Athens to Larissa. This is read through the semic code: it is interpreted as part of the game's interface to let the user know the extent of the army's movement in a single move; also, the grey colour on the flag can be read through the proairetic code: it indicates to the user that this is a powerful army capable of capturing a walled city like Larissa. Therefore Thero Ibera is most probably moving against Larissa.

It is, therefore, by means of such complex reasoning, the outcome of the chain of meaning in the spiral of the process of semiosis that the gamer traverses the text. By interpreting the basic signs, which incite to action, and then the combination of signs enable further interpretations that facilitate gameplay and narrative development. Thus the game text opens up for a critical analysis that could involve additional theoretical approaches: for instance, starting with the interpretation of iconic signs the critic could focus on issues of representation to discuss immersion in the gameworld; or with the help of the hermeneutic, proairetic, or symbolic code one might probe into the narrative dimension and argue for instance that in God-Games particularly, there may be not only one story, but four of them;[8] similarly, another researcher could utilize the relevant codes and interrogate the text from a ludology perspective: degrees of antagonism in the game, the role of chance, even role-playing.

Conclusion

Endorsing Frasca's proposal to bridge the theoretical gap in the so-called narratology vs. ludology debate and expanding on it, the present article proceeds to address the core of the methodological problem in Computer Games Studies. From the discussion made it transpires that, instead of excluding one another, both narratology and ludology could join forces to dissolve the dilemma. It became also obvious that due to the hybrid, technology based medium of computer games, a wider theoretical framework is necessary, flexible enough to encompass divergent theoretical perspectives in the critical analysis of videogame texts. The brand of semiotics “text vs. practice” proposed here fulfils this purpose. It will allow the contribution of both narratology and ludology, or any other relevant theoretical perspective to enable the researcher investigate crucial issues, such as the role of narrative in computer games, the type or degree of interaction with the user, issues of immersion in the gameworld, etc., problems that were the cause for the debate in the first place. Eventually Computer Games Studies may evolve as an academic discipline to help understand the nature of computer games as a new cultural form.

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[8] James Paul Gee made this point in his lecture at the University of Melbourne. First the Back-up, or the Designers story which is used to just set the implicit narrative, so that the game does not play in a vacuum; then the player's story which is the trajectory of moves of the map: this is more important because it helps the shaping and completion of the text; then the player's career story: the skills accumulated by the player to start from novice to expert level; finally, the creation of virtual stories, the numerous versions of the historical fact (counterfactual as well), with the difference that the player does not create them as historian, but as God Almighty.

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List of Figures

Figure 1. The NDP Group report on Money Spent monthly on Entertainment.

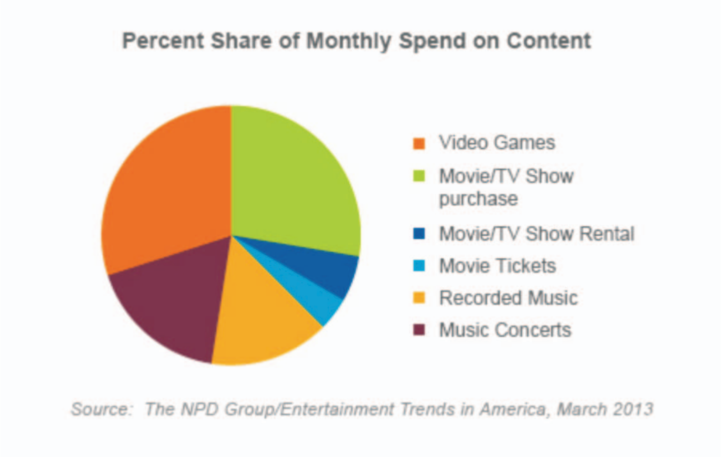
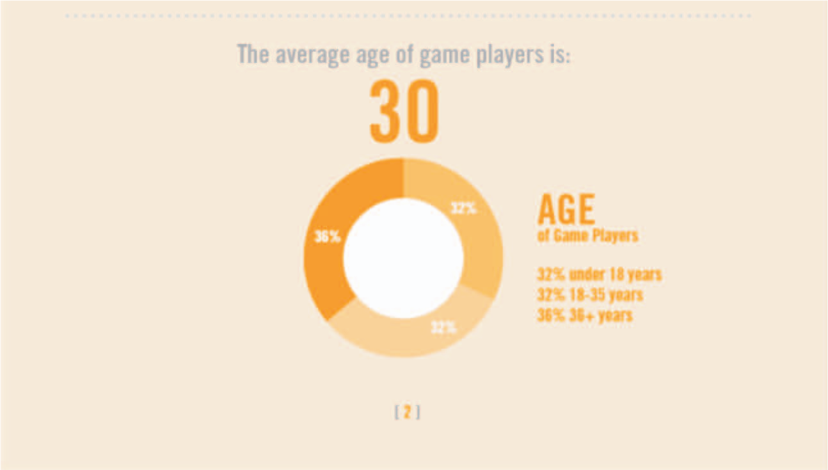
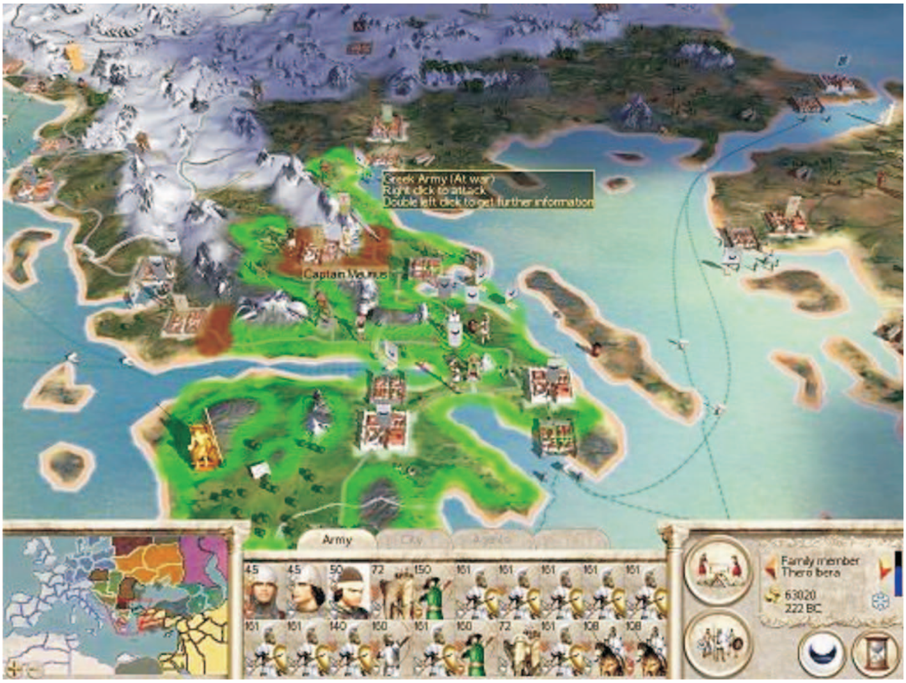


Figure 2. Age and gender specific statistics of game players.



Source: The ESA report, 2013.

Figure 3. The Campaign Map *RTW* (screenshot).



Greek Army (At war)
Right click to attack
Double left click to get further information

Captain Maurus
Army
City
Agents
45
45
50
72
150
161
161
161
161
161
161
161
140
160
161
160
72
161
108
108
Family member
63020
222 BC

Source: Heavengames.com. Rome Total War: The Strategic Map

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Unknowable Protagonists and Narrative Delirium in *American Psycho* and *Hotline Miami*:

A Case Study in Character Engagement Across the Media

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Abstract. Empathetic perspective-taking is one of the main psychological mechanisms behind audiences' engagement with narrative (Coplan 2004; Eder 2006). What happens, however, when a story confronts us with a character whose emotions, motivations, and beliefs we fail to understand? This paper examines the phenomenon of "unreadable minds" (Abbott 2008) from a transmedial perspective: how do audiences relate to a character who defies all attempts at making sense of his or her identity despite being the main focus of a narrative? My case studies – the novel *American Psycho* (1991) by Bret Easton Ellis and the video game *Hotline Miami* (Dennaton Games 2012) – foreground two such characters: by calling attention to the opaqueness of their protagonists, they heighten the audiences' interest in – and puzzlement at – their identity. In my comparative analysis I explore two dimensions that contribute to audiences' sense of unknowability of the protagonists: the hallucinations and delusions experienced by both characters (an instance of what Bernaerts [2009] calls "narrative delirium"); and their extreme violence, which raises unanswered ethical questions. While bringing out the continuities between *American Psycho* and *Hotline Miami*, I also highlight how the interactivity of *Hotline Miami* makes the central paradox of relating to an unknowable character even more salient for the audience. In this way, I show that the video game medium has reached a level of interpretive complexity that can stand the comparison with literary fiction.

Keywords: fictional characters, empathy, mind-reading, mental illness, unreliability.

More than other narratological categories, "character" seems easily transposable across the media. Such flexibility depends on the ways in which the concept of character is bound up with notions of person, subjectivity, and consciousness, which audiences effortlessly transfer from everyday interactions to a broad range of media engagements (Herman 2011). Yet fictional characters can also challenge audiences' understanding of other minds, providing models for behaviour and mental patterns that may strike us as radically strange, unacceptable, or incomprehensible.[1] One of the most interesting examples of these defamiliarizing effects of character is the phenomenon studied by Porter Abbott under the heading of "unreadable minds," characters who remain frustratingly opaque and unknowable because they "[defy] all efforts to read [them]" (2008, 449). My paper picks up on Abbott's notion in order to contribute to a transmedial approach to character, exploring two media artefacts – Bret Easton Ellis's novel *American Psycho* (1991) and the video game *Hotline Miami* (Dennaton Games 2012) – whose protagonists remain opaque and unknowable to the audience despite orienting the narrative perspective through, respectively, first-person narration and internal focalization. The recipients of these texts are thus given a paradoxical sense of being internal to – and yet barred from – the protagonist's subjectivity. Investigating this paradox will allow me to advance a few hypotheses regarding audiences' engagement with characters in two media, literary fiction and video games. My main concern, however, will be the affordances of the video game medium, and particularly the role of physical interaction with the medium – which I call, following Aarseth (1997), ergodicity – in guiding audiences' responses to character. The more standard forms of character engagements provided by *American Psycho* will offer a counterpoint to my analysis of *Hotline Miami*, shedding light on how our attitude towards characters can change at the intersection of narrativity and ergodicity.

Video games often present us with characters who are shaped in key ways by our gameplay choices: we can determine their name, look, skills, class, and even moral orientation.[2] The avatar's identity can be more or less predetermined (in classic point-and-click adventures), it can depend on the player's moral choices (in games such *The Witcher* [CD Projekt RED 2007] or *The Walking Dead* [Telltale Games 2012]), or it can be completely up to the player, as in some, mostly online, role-playing games which invite us to come up with our avatar's "backstory." In all these cases the avatar's beliefs, emotions, and values are accessible to the player – indeed, they are even more accessible insofar as they are shaped by his or her decisions.

By contrast, in *Hotline Miami* the real nature of the protagonist remains open or undetermined: the text calls attention to the protagonist's identity while at the same time frustrating any attempt at making sense of it. The unknowability of the character's mind thus becomes an engine of interpretation, where interpretation is defined as the player's construction of thematic meanings distinct from the more immediate, ergodic forms of involvement that characterize gameplay (cf. "kinaesthetic" and "ludic" involvement in Gordon Calleja's [2011] model). This turn to interpretation may look like a concession to traditional, non-ergodic narrative media, and may seem to reflect a hybridizing attitude typical of experimental video games, where medium-specific boundaries are often challenged. But this foregrounding of interpretation also hints at the power of narrative blanks and gaps and at how they may be used to generate interest in ergodic media, particularly when such gaps concern the identity of the avatar the game asks us to control. Thus, this essay will examine how players relate to a character whose identity remains ambiguous and in some important ways unreadable, and can be negotiated only in interpretation – that is, outside of in-game interactions.

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[1] For recent discussions on this point in narrative theory, cf. Mäkelä (2013) and Caracciolo (2014a).

[2] Jørgensen (2010) has explored the intersection between narration and characterization in video games.

In this way, I aim to show how the video game medium has reached a level of interpretive complexity comparable to that of literary fiction. In 2006, Marie-Laure Ryan remarked that "literature seeks the gray area of the ambiguous, while games […] thrive in the Manichean world of 'the good guys' versus 'the bad guys' […]. If players had to debate the morality of their actions, the pace of the game, not to mention its strategic appeal, would seriously suffer" (2006, 196). My sense is that the situation has changed significantly in recent years, partly thanks to the efforts of independent developers whose games cater for the tastes of smaller, but much more sophisticated audiences than in the past.[3] Independent games like *Hotline Miami* are often less technically impressive than mainstream productions, at least from a graphical perspective, but they move beyond conventional plot trajectories and focus on the exploration of psychologically and existentially relevant themes. This is the assumption behind my comparative analysis of *American Psycho* and *Hotline Miami*. I will stress that the interpretive complexity of games such as *Hotline Miami* does not side-line the ergodicity of the game medium itself; on the contrary, it emerges from a clash between players' control over the avatar's physical actions and their being barred from understanding the avatar's mental states, motivations, and past experiences. What is more, this lack of understanding is thematized by the game itself: we realize that we are controlling a character whose identity defies our interpretive abilities.[4]

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[3] Cf. Ciccoricco (2007): "it is clear that some forms of game design and production are growing in artistic – and indeed, literary – sophistication and complexity."

[4] Ismail (2012) has made a similar case for the thematic complexity of *Hotline Miami*: on his interpretation, the game questions morality and violence "through methods only videogames can employ."

This paradox reveals what Berys Gaut (1999) has called the "aspectual" nature of audiences' engagement with characters – a dimension that literary and cinematic storytelling have long exploited (Eder 2006; Caracciolo 2014b), but that is not usually foregrounded in video games. According to Gaut, relating to characters can invite us to mentally take on the character's perspective through an empathetic, identification mechanism. However, such engagement is never an either/or phenomenon but always involves a specific "aspect" of the character's perspective.[5] We may distinguish between perceptual, somatic, emotional, epistemic, and axiological perspective-taking. ("Somatic" is my addition to Gaut's original distinction; it includes empathy for bodily states – for instance, pain – as well as for bodily gestures and movements – so-called kinaesthetic empathy.)[6] As my analysis of *Hotline Miami* will demonstrate, audiences are likely to empathize with the protagonist kinaesthetically but are unable to relate to him emotionally and epistemically. This asymmetry in players' engagement with the protagonist forces them to contemplate his unreadability. My close reading of *American Psycho* will serve as a foil in this respect: Ellis's novel also invites us to imagine an unreadable mind, but through its lack of ergodicity it encourages a more consistently external, third-personal stance towards its narrator. The central paradox of *Hotline Miami* is, therefore, felt less strongly in Ellis's novel, thus demonstrating how productive the interaction between ergodicity and more traditional strategies of characterization can be in video games.

A few preliminary words to introduce my case studies. *Hotline Miami* is a 2D top-down action game designed by Jonatan Söderström and Dennis Wedin. As pointed out by many commentators, this game draws inspiration from the film *Drive* (2011) by Danish director Nicolas Winding Refn, who is even thanked in the game's credits. Ellis's *American Psycho* (1991) is the 400-page-long monologue of a yuppie whose life – as we gradually find out – is entirely devoted to rape, torture, and murder. A reviewer of *Hotline Miami* (Meer 2012) has already called attention to the similarities between these two texts, and I will pursue this parallel in the following pages by focussing on three dimensions of their protagonists' minds. First, both characters appear to suffer from hallucinations and delusions, which result in unreliable narration[7] and a generalized sense of epistemological instability; second, they both perform shocking (and completely gratuitous) acts of violence. Third, unreliability and violence jointly contribute to the perceived opaqueness and inaccessibility of the protagonists' identities.

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[5] Along similar lines, Coplan (2004, 144) argues that empathetic perspective-taking always preserves the "self-other differentiation."

[6] The other aspects should be self-explanatory, but here's a brief outline: when taking a character's perspective at the perceptual level, audiences imagine the character's perceptual experience; at the emotional level, they feel something akin to his or her emotions; at the epistemic level, they imagine holding his or her beliefs about the world; at the axiological level, they imagine sharing his or her values and goals.

1. "All of This Is Not Really Happening:" Epistemological Instability

Lars Bernaerts (2009) has used the term "narrative delirium" to refer to situations in which a character's psychotic hallucinations and delusions become the engine of narrative progression. Bernaerts's example of narrative delirium is *Fight Club* (1996), a novel in which one of the main characters, Tyler Durden, is revealed to be a projection of the narrator's own self, who suffers – as the text explicitly spells out – from multiple personality disorder. Neither *American Psycho* nor *Hotline Miami* lead to a revelation along the lines of *Fight Club*: they offer cues of narrative delirium, but this is bound to remain an interpretive hypothesis, one partially (but never completely) supported by textual data.

In *American Psycho* the reality of the narrator's extreme brutality is never directly questioned; however, frequent cinematic references and parallels undermine the reader's confidence in the reliability of the narrator's account: the narrator, Patrick Bateman, thinks of his life, and even of the situations he is reporting (the novel is entirely in the present tense) in terms of cinematic techniques. Cinema functions as a distortion filter superimposed on the narrator's reality, one that – because of its stereotypical nature – can be readily detected by the audience, thus functioning as a cue of narratorial unreliability. Here is how Patrick himself puts it: "I am so used to imagining everything happening the way it occurs in movies, visualizing things falling somehow into the shape of events on a screen, that I almost hear the swelling of an orchestra, can almost hallucinate the camera panning low around us, fireworks bursting in slow motion overhead, the seventy-millimeter image of her lips parting and the subsequent murmur of 'I want you' in Dolby sound" (1991, 265).

Another reason why Bateman's account of his atrocities is implausible is that he always manages to get away with them, without ever worrying about hiding his tracks. The one scene in which he does face the police is so rich in cinematic cues that it becomes difficult *not* to think that this is the work of the narrator's delirious fantasy. This chapter reads like a sequence in an action movie, with the perspective switching from the first to the third person in mid-sentence, as if to heighten the cinematic effect – topped off here by Patrick's largely conventional one-liner as he compliments himself on his reckless driving: "Racing blindly down Greenwich I lose control entirely, the cab swerves into a Korean deli, next to a karaoke restaurant called Lotus Blossom I've been to with Japanese clients, the cab rolling over fruit stands, smashing through a wall of glass, the body of a cashier thudding across the hood, Patrick tries to put the cab in reverse but nothing happens, he staggers out of the cab, leaning against it, a nerve-racking silence follows, 'nice going, Bateman,' he mutters, limping out of the store, the body on the hood moaning in agony, Patrick with no idea where the cop running toward him across the street has come from" (1991, 349).

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[7] Hansen (2008) has addressed some of the challenges that arise when theorizing unreliable narration in a transmedial context. I will not expand on these issues here, but it should be stressed that the label "unreliable narration" can only be applied metaphorically to *Hotline Miami*, which strictly speaking has an unreliable focalizing character, not a narrator.

As he is about to shoot the officer Patrick even feels the need for a musical soundtrack: "Patrick keeps thinking there should be music, he forces a demonic leer, his heart thumping, and manages quite easily to bring the gun up to the cop's face, two pairs of hands holding it but Patrick's finger pulls the trigger" (1991, 349). All these stylistic and thematic devices work towards undermining the credibility of the narrator's account, thus reinforcing the interpretation that Bateman's monologue is in fact an instance of narrative delirium. A confirmation of this comes when Bateman visits the apartment of one of his victims, Paul Owen, finding no trace of the horrible atrocities he claimed to have committed there. The narrator expresses his surprise at the mysterious disappearance of the mangled bodies he remembers having left in the apartment: "There has been no word of bodies discovered in any of the city's four newspapers or on the local news; no hints of even a rumor floating around. I've gone so far as to ask people – dates, business acquaintances – over dinners, in the halls of Pierce & Pierce, if anyone has heard about two mutilated prostitutes found in Paul Owen's apartment" (1991, 366–367). Finally, when Bateman decides to confess to a friend that he has murdered Owen, his interlocutor takes it as a joke because, he remarks, he has "had… dinner… with Paul Owen… twice… in London… just ten days ago" (1991, 388). However, since these clues of narrative delirium appear only towards the end of the novel, it is impossible to disentangle reality from hallucination in a retroactive way, establishing whether Bateman's narration is delirious through and through, or whether some of the brutalities he reports are true. The effect is therefore different from the "mind-tricking" (see Klecker

2013) narration of novels such as *Fight Club*, where the sudden perspective shift (finding out that Tyler is a product of the narrator's imagination) leaves nothing to be explained: after this kind of plot twist, we know what was fabricated and what was real in the narrator's monologue. In *American Psycho* we do not have this privilege, and are left in an epistemic no man's land.

Narrative unreliability is also used in an epistemically ambiguous way in *Hotline Miami*. Unlike the narrator of Ellis's novel, the protagonist of *Hotline Miami* does not have a name: he is often referred to as "Jacket" in online discussions of the game because of the letterman jacket he wears throughout the story. The game begins with Jacket's encounter with three mysterious masked characters in his living room. The masks' words revolve around the protagonist's identity, thus setting the stage for one of the main themes of the game. One of the masked figures, Richard, asks whether the protagonist remembers him [Fig. 1]. Through a flashback, the game follows Jacket's memories to April 3. This move clearly associates the narrative perspective with the protagonist; though we have no indications of its unreliability, we at least know that the game world is filtered through the protagonist's consciousness.[8]

The game proper begins on April 3, with Jacket answering a phone call which instructs him to eliminate everyone at a certain location and retrieve a briefcase. All the missions involve breaking into a building and killing everyone in sight: the game's scoring system rewards multiple, gruesome kills with short-range weapons such golf clubs, hammers and even a power drill (the same weapon used by the narrator of *American Psycho* in some of his murders). After successfully completing each mission, Jacket goes into a store (bar, pizza place, video store) and picks up his order at the counter.

In itself, this set-up leaves little room for questioning the reliability of what we see: the phone calls punctuate the game in Grand Theft Auto fashion, and even the appearance of the masked figures is somewhat conventional, given the game's genre (and the intermedial reference to the movie *Drive*, where the protagonist also wears a mask in the final sequence). It is only much later in the game that the first clues of the protagonist's narrative delirium begin to emerge. At the end of chapter 8, Jacket goes into a store for his usual post-mission stopover. This time, however, a headless body is lying on the floor: the player may recognize it as the body of Biker, the mobster boss killed by Jacket in chapter 7. The protagonist's conversation with the store employee takes an unprecedented direction: "This… all of this is not really happening," he says [Fig. 2]. After the words "allow me to demonstrate!" the corpse disappears, leaving only a pool of blood behind – a sudden revelation accompanied by static-like distortions on the computer screen, as in a disturbed TV transmission. This sort of visual overlay is used by some video games – for instance, *Mass Effect* (2007) – to convey a cinematic "feel," but in this particular context it takes on a different meaning: by reminding the player of the mediated nature of the video game, it provides a visual (and remediated) stand-in for the unreliability of the protagonist's perception of the game world. The visual noise is metaphorically blended with the character's distorted experience, and will continue to serve this function throughout the game.

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[8] For more on focalization in players' engagement with characters, see Vella (2013).

This surreal scene passes by without any further comment, but the player's confidence in the reality status of the events told by the game is likely to be shaken: is this the game world's baseline reality, or is it rather the product of the character's narrative delirium? Several bizarre – and mostly grisly – visions recur in the following chapters, but it is only in the conclusion that the unreliability of Jacket's perception of the game world takes centre stage, and with a deeply unsettling twist. At the end of the game's allegedly "final" chapter, Jacket confronts and kills the boss of the Russian mafia. Not much of the game's plot is explained, however, and as the end credits roll it is easy to wonder whether Jacket's story makes sense at all. But when one hits the "Esc" key to quit the credits, the game – surprisingly – goes on. A new section of the game is revealed, featuring four chapters which did not even appear among the game's levels before playing what was supposed to be the finale. In the first of these chapters, a caption signals a flashback by "rewinding" the game to an earlier time point, with the usual static effect in the background. Here the player is asked to control a different character, not the Jacket of the game's first part but the motorcycle-helmet-wearing Biker killed by Jacket at the end of chapter 7. It turns out that this character too is receiving the mysterious phone calls. And at the end of chapter 18 – one chapter away from the game's real finale – we are given the chance to replay the same fight between Jacket and Biker from the latter's perspective [Fig. 3].

This time, however, Biker wins the fight, and in a disconcertingly easy way – almost as if this was a cinematic cut scene rather than part of the real game. Hence the question: are Jacket's exploits after killing Biker – in chapters 8 through the supposedly "final" one – real, or are they rather a hallucination experienced after having been knocked out by Biker, as it has been suggested in online fan sites?[9]

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[9] Cf. Damuel (2013): "Remember the fight with the [Biker]? He bashes in Jacket's head in his story. [...] Hence, everything we see after the fight with the Biker is unreliable. From Jacket's side anyways. The Biker's story is the correct side of things."

The storyline of *Hotline Miami* seems to dissolve into two different interpretations, focalized by Jacket and Biker respectively: according to the first, Jacket kills Biker and pursues his quest until his final encounter with the Russian mafia boss (the second part of the game, where the player controls Biker, is thus taken as an alternative storyline); according to the second interpretation, Biker wins the fight against Jacket, and the first part of the game reflects Jacket's comatose delirium. Although Biker's perspective is foregrounded because it is – in a sense – final, its positioning after the game's "official" ending makes it difficult to evaluate its reality status vis-à-vis the game's first and main part. This device adds a layer of (counterfactual) complexity, contributing to making the game world – and hence Jacket's identity – opaque to the player.

2. "You've Done Some Terrible Things:" Engaging with Violence

Both *Hotline Miami* and *American Psycho* are characterized by extreme violence, but the audience's responses to it are likely to be radically different. At this level – more than vis-à-vis the epistemological instability examined in the previous section – the ergodicity of the game medium seems to shape profoundly the audience's experience, making players less likely to feel physical or moral disgust while engaging with *Hotline Miami*. This game is indeed full of blood and gore, and as I pointed out above its scoring system rewards multiple, spectacular killings. However, several factors contribute to making the violence of *Hotline Miami* less horrifying than in *American Psycho*. First of all, Jacket's brutalities are never portrayed with the degree of particularity of Ellis's novel. Patrick Bateman favours individual murders, lingering on the obscene details of severed limbs and crushed skulls, and most of his tortures are of a shockingly sexual nature. Such profusion of hyper-realistic violence explains why the publication of *American Psycho* stirred up so much controversy, with publisher Simon and Schuster refusing to print the book after a few excerpts had appeared in magazines. Indeed, as Namwali Serpell (2009, 48–49) argues, the unreliability of the narrator – and in particular the argument that the described violence is imaginary, not real – have often served to redeem the novel in the eyes of the public opinion, undermining the charges of immorality levelled not just at the narrator but at its author. Even for a reader who does not share this moral condemnation of the novel as a whole it is difficult not to feel a mixture of physical disgust for the narrator's graphic descriptions, moral disgust for his extreme brutalities, and sympathy for his helpless victims. All this will encourage readers to distance themselves from the narrator, blocking out empathetic tendencies and possibly resulting in what has been called “imaginative resistance” (Gendler 2000), or the complete rejection of the character’s moral perspective (see Caracciolo 2013).

By contrast, *Hotline Miami* asks the player to become more complicit in the protagonist’s violence. One of the masked figures tells Jacket, “as of lately [sic] you’ve done some terrible things” [Fig. 4], a statement that may increase the audience’s awareness of the ethical stakes of the violence. Yet, unlike Patrick Bateman, Jacket is a gangster, not a serial killer, and most of his victims are violent thugs. Moreover, the player’s familiarity with the conventions of action video games may take the edge off their ethical condemnation through a process of habituation: we come to expect violence in some video game genres, and we even come to enjoy it because of the way it is “cordoned off” from real-world violence. In this sense, what Gordon Calleja (2011) calls “kinaesthetic involvement” clearly plays an important role in modulating players’ responses to the violence. What players enjoy is not so much, or not predominantly, the violence, but rather the skilful interactions with the medium that enable them to “choreograph [their] way” – as one reviewer puts it (Onyett 2012) – through the levels. The game rewards fast and expert kills, encouraging players to knock down the highest number of enemies in one fell swoop. As psychologists Hayes and Tipper (2012, 56) explain, “action fluency evokes positive affect in the performer as well as in those who merely observe the action.” In this case, of course, the player is *both* the observer of the avatar’s fluent actions (as displayed on the screen) and a performer who is able to skilfully interact with the game controls.

Following again Calleja (2011), kinaesthetic and narrative involvement seem to go hand in hand here: the close integration between the player’s skill and the avatar’s virtuoso actions turns into kinaesthetic empathy *for the character*, thus increasing players’ closeness with him and possibly giving them an illusion of access to Jacket’s consciousness. Yet such access is bound to remain partial, because the protagonist’s identity is concealed and as if opaque to the player. Thus, the empathetic bond between the audience and Jacket only makes the unknowability of the latter’s beliefs, emotions, and motives stand out. And this, of course, is example of where the ergodicity of the game medium does impact the player’s engagement with the protagonist: it fosters rather than inhibits an empathetic relationship and thus marks a radical departure from the non-ergodic *American Psycho*, where the violence is likely to result in an increased distance between the audience and the narrator.

3. "Myself Is Fabricated, an Aberration:" Unknowable Identity

What are the motivations of the protagonists of *American Psycho* and *Hotline Miami*? What are their attitudes and emotions towards their victims? Where does their narrative delirium end, and where does the reality of the fictional world begin? Not only are these questions left unanswered, but they are explicitly thematized by both texts – a strategy that only increases the audience's awareness of the unknowability of the protagonists.

In *American Psycho*, a number of passages hint at the impossibility of making sense of Patrick Bateman, as in the following remarks by Bateman's girlfriend: "'Oh god, Patrick,' she sobs, blowing her nose into the handkerchief I've tossed her. 'You're so lousy. You're… inhuman.' 'No, I'm… ' I stall again. 'You… are not… ' She stops, wiping her face, unable to finish. 'I'm not what?' I ask, waiting, interested. 'You are not' – she sniffs, looks down, her shoulders heaving – 'all there. You' – she chokes – 'don't add up'" (1991, 341–342). As a person, Patrick Bateman can only be understood in negative terms: he is inhuman, he does not add up – hence, it is impossible for his girlfriend as well as for the reader to form a coherent image of who he is.

Bateman's lack of moral conscience is also a lack of human consciousness, an unrecognizability of the narrator *as* human: in Bateman's own words, "if I were an actual automaton, what difference would there really be?" (1991, 343). Eventually, this turns into an unsettling acknowledgement on the part of the narrator of the blank slate of his own identity: "There is an idea of a Patrick Bateman, some kind of abstraction, but there is no real me, only an entity, something illusory, and though I can hide my cold gaze and you can shake my hand and feel flesh gripping yours and maybe you can even sense our lifestyles are probably comparable: I simply am not there. It is hard for me to make sense on any given level. Myself is fabricated, an aberration. I am a noncontingent human being. My personality is sketchy and unformed, my heartlessness goes deep and is persistent. My conscience, my pity, my hopes disappeared a long time ago (probably at Harvard) if they ever did exist" (1991, 366–367). The character's unknowability is the upshot of the illusory, fabricated nature of his identity, which here almost hints at Bateman's realization of his own character status – his being a textual function, a bearer of pure "heartlessness" rather than a flesh-and-blood human being. This suggestion of metalepsis complicates the epistemological instability highlighted above, thus further obstructing the reader's access to the narrator's identity. The irony here is that, despite the apparent lack of mediation of first-person narration, which seems to put us face to face with a (fictional) subjectivity, we can engage with a 400-page-long monologue while remaining in the dark as to who the monologist really is.

The strategy employed by *Hotline Miami* to problematize the protagonist's identity is more polyphonic, but works to a similar effect. The game does not rely on the character's voice, to the extent that in interacting with other characters the protagonist never speaks a single line. Rather, it exploits an ensemble of voices – the masked figures that introduce all of the game's parts – to convey a sense of the protagonist's unknowability. The protagonist's identity is already called into question in the game's intro sequence by a masked figure known as "Don Juan" [Fig. 4]. At first, Don Juan suggests to "leave it at that," refusing to reveal anything about the protagonist's identity. He then draws a connection between acknowledging the "terrible things" done by the protagonist and knowing him, as if engaging with Jacket's violence (which is what the game invites the player to do) could shed light on his identity. This statement is ambiguously suspended between two interpretations: on the one hand, it may seem to promise that after acknowledging the character's actions – by re-enacting them – we may find out who the character is. On the other hand, it can be taken to mean that violence is the protagonist's true nature.

The game thus teases the player with the possibility of a revelation that will never come, as stressed repeatedly throughout the game by the masked figures. Consider, for instance, Jacket's last meeting with Richard [Fig. 5]. Coming home after one of his missions, Jacket sees what looks like his own corpse in a pool of blood on the floor; Richard, seated on the sofa, cryptically remarks that "you will never see the whole picture… and it's all your own fault" before shooting Jacket. The story is destined not to make any sense, not even after having played through Biker's interpretation of the events in the game's last part.

In sum, the masked figures repeatedly call attention to the gaps in the narrative; they highlight the impossibility of reaching an understanding of the protagonist's emotions as well as of the reasons for his involvement with Miami's underworld of crime. We may even speculate that the masked characters are projections of Jacket's disturbed psyche: these are, after all, three of the masks that the player can choose to wear before each mission. Through the mediation of these personas, Jacket may be looking back at recent events until his fight against Biker (remember that the protagonist's first encounter with the masks resulted in Jacket "remembering something" and a flashback to April 3). In a sense, then, it is Jacket himself who is questioning his identity, in a way that is at least partially similar to Bateman's explaining that his "personality is sketchy and unformed" in *American Psycho*. The paradox is that Jacket's narrative delirium grants us direct access to his distorted experience of the game world while at the same time frustrating the player's desire to know more about him. The unknowability of the protagonist is made even more evident by the kinaesthetic empathy we develop for him by enacting his violence through the game levels: the player can relate to Jacket kinaesthetically but not emotionally or epistemically – an asymmetry that increases our discomfort as we engage with the game's narrative.

Conclusion

In this essay I have examined some of the strategies through which narrative media can frustrate our attempts at making sense of characters' mental lives and identities, exploiting the "aspectual" nature of our engagement with characters. One of the upshots of this discussion is that the portrayal of non-ordinary states of consciousness – for instance, hallucinations and delusions – is a powerful tool for giving audiences an illusion of access into characters' consciousness while challenging their everyday understanding of mental life (or "folk psychology," as philosophers call it; see Churchland 1991). Further, the sense of epistemological instability created by what I have called, following Bernaerts (2009), narrative delirium is an engine of narrative interest because it encourages audiences to attend to ontological boundaries between perception and imagination, truthfulness and falsification – all of which are central to our cognitive faculties and our interactions with the physical and socio-cultural world.

Combined with the ethical and emotional salience of the representation of violence, such narrative interest is likely to intensify the audience's engagement with a character, leaving them wondering about the character's emotions, values, and motives. However, when their questions remain unanswered, and the character's unknowability is openly flaunted, audiences are caught in an interpretive loop: they retain a sense of sharing a character's experience through internal focalization, but at the same time they are forced to contemplate the character's radical otherness, without being able to resolve or conventionalize it. This discrepancy becomes even more paradoxical in ergodic media such as video games, where the player's kinaesthetic and ludic involvement is likely to create an empathetic connection with a protagonist whose emotions and motivations are bound to remain opaque. In this way, I have explored continuities and discontinuities between strategies of characterization and character engagement in ergodic and non-ergodic media, showing how video games' potential for eliciting narrative interest and interpretive meaning-making is not inferior to that of literary storytelling. Indeed, my analysis of *Hotline Miami* suggests that ergodicity and narrativity can work in tandem in creating the puzzles that I have investigated here, paving the way for complex interpretations that hinge on the thematization of identity and irreducible otherness.

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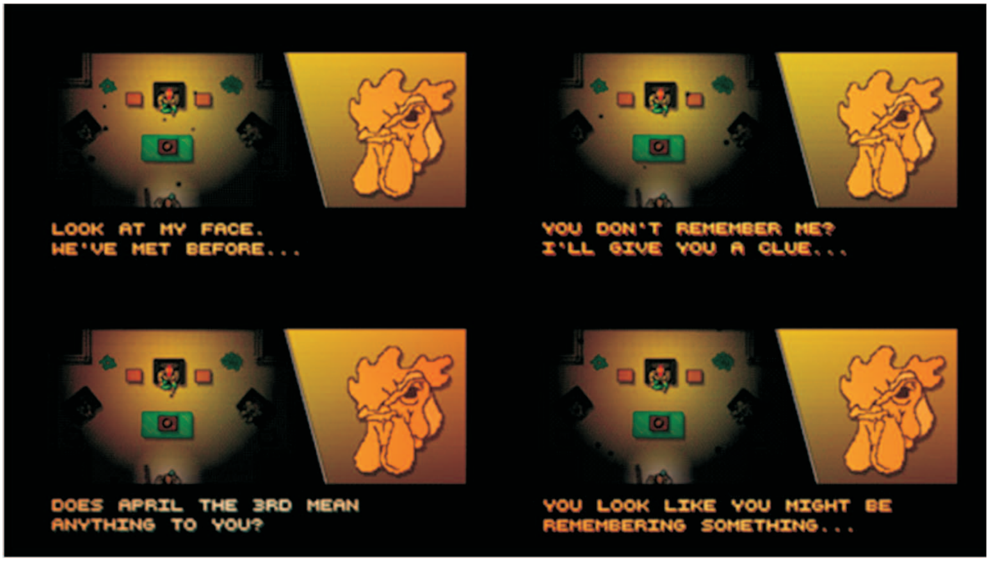
List of Figures

Figure 1. Jacket's first encounter with the masked characters.



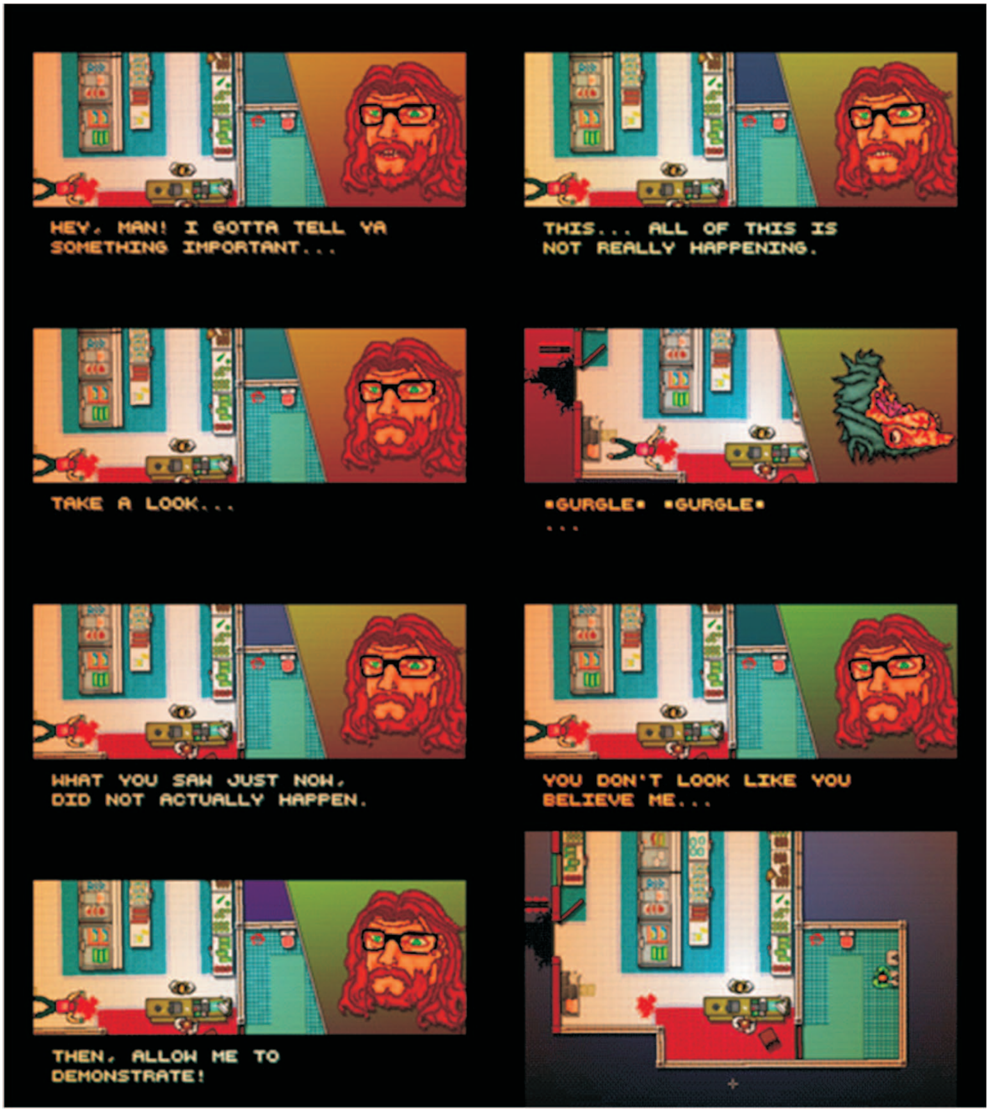
LOOK AT MY FACE.
WE'VE MET BEFORE...

YOU DON'T REMEMBER ME?
I'LL GIVE YOU A CLUE...

DOES APRIL THE 3RD MEAN
ANYTHING TO YOU?

YOU LOOK LIKE YOU MIGHT BE
REMEMBERING SOMETHING...

Figure 2. Narrative unreliability in *Hotline Miami*.



HEY, MAN! I GOTTA TELL YA
SOMETHING IMPORTANT...

THIS... ALL OF THIS IS
NOT REALLY HAPPENING.

TAKE A LOOK...

GURGLE *GURGLE*
...

WHAT YOU SAW JUST NOW,
DID NOT ACTUALLY HAPPEN.

YOU DON'T LOOK LIKE YOU
BELIEVE ME...

THEN, ALLOW ME TO
DEMONSTRATE!

Figure 3. Two contradictory accounts of the events: Jacket kills Biker (chapter 7, on the left), Biker kills Jacket (chapter 18, on the right).

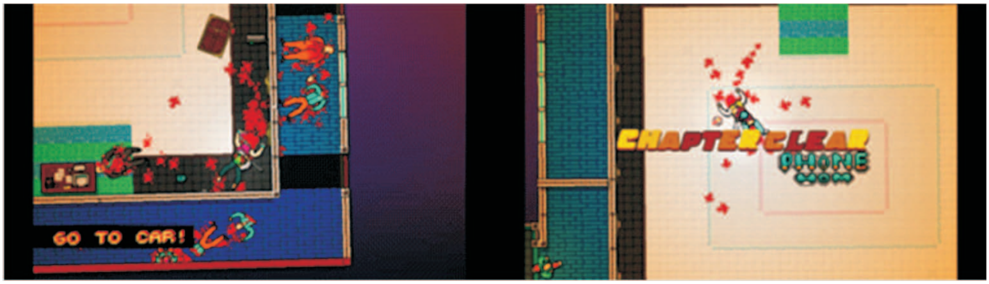
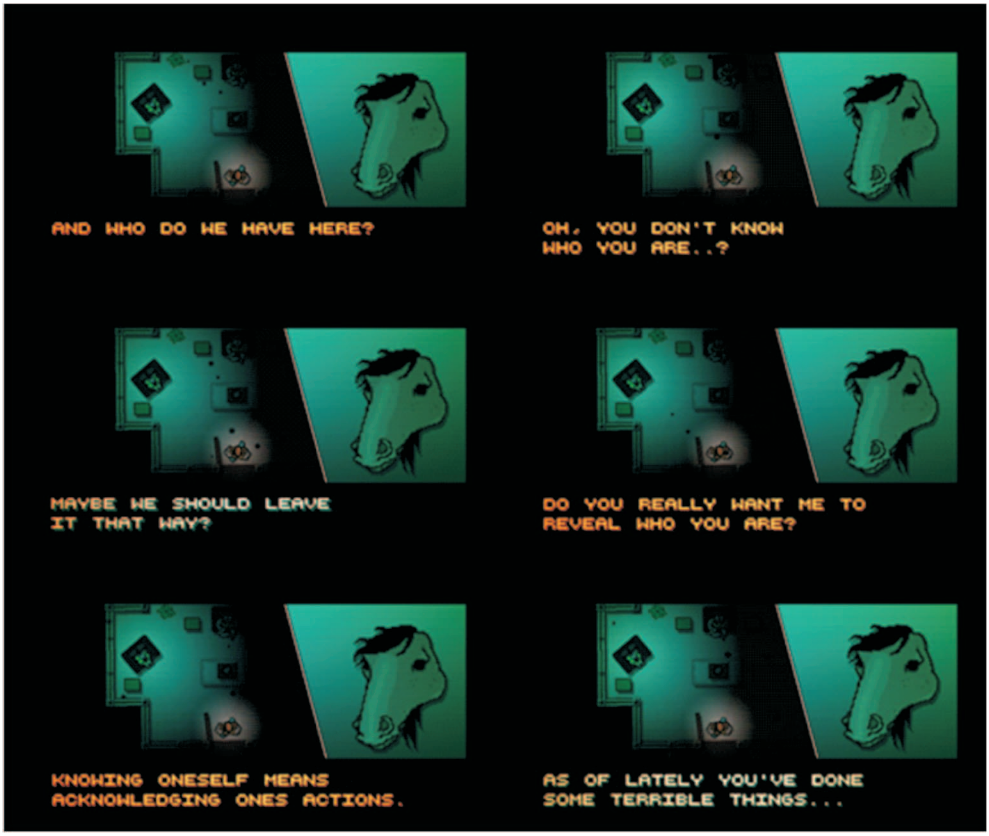


Figure 4. Don Juan asks questions about Biker's identity.



AND WHO DO WE HAVE HERE?

OH, YOU DON'T KNOW
WHO YOU ARE..?

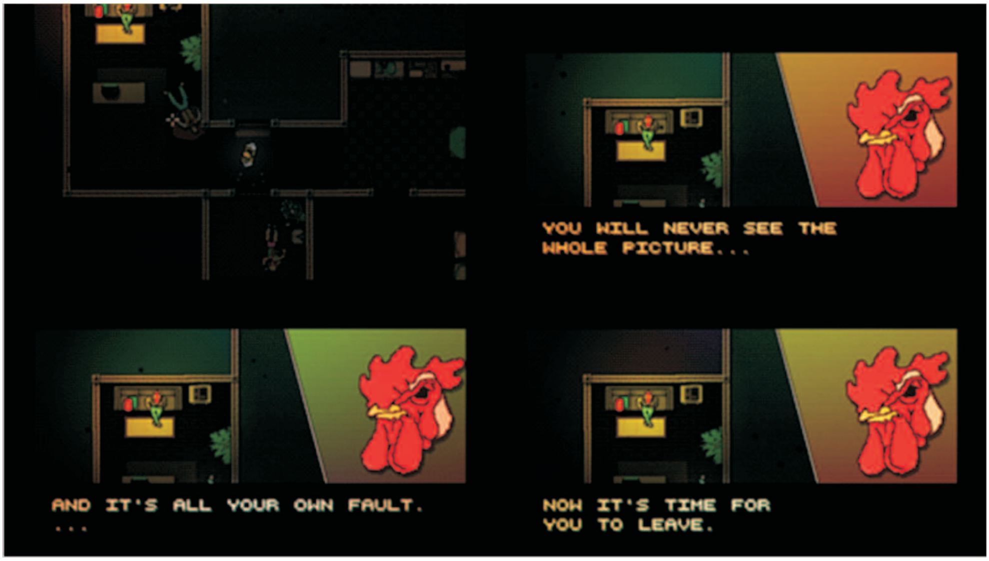
MAYBE WE SHOULD LEAVE
IT THAT WAY?

DO YOU REALLY WANT ME TO
REVEAL WHO YOU ARE?

KNOWING ONESELF MEANS
ACKNOWLEDGING ONES ACTIONS.

AS OF LATELY YOU'VE DONE
SOME TERRIBLE THINGS...

Figure 5. Richard on making sense of the story.


YOU WILL NEVER SEE THE
WHOLE PICTURE...
AND IT'S ALL YOUR OWN FAULT.
...
NOW IT'S TIME FOR
YOU TO LEAVE.

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Rethinking the Perceived Self: Samples from Facebook

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Abstract. How the self perceives reality is a traditional topic of research across several disciplines. I examine the perceived self on Facebook, as a case-study of self-knowledge on "classical" social media. Following Blascovich & Bailenson (2011), I consider the distinction between the real and the virtual as relative. Perceptual self-knowledge, filtered through social media, requires rethinking the perceived self in terms of social reality (Neisser, 1993). This claim dovetails Jenkins's (2013) notion of the self as an active participant in consumption. I argue that the perceived self in social media could be conceived in terms of how it would like to be perceived and appraised by its virtual audience. Using Neisser's (1993) typology of self-knowledge and Castañeda's (1983) theory of *I-guises*, I analyse seven samples from Anglo-American and Bulgarian Facebook sites and show that the perceived self produces itself online as a captivating presence with a credible story. My samples are taken from FB community pages with negligible cultural differences across an online teenage/twens (twixter) age group. I then discuss some problematic aspects of the perceived self online, as well as recent critiques of technoconsumerism.[1]

Keywords: perceived self, social media, perceived reality, Facebook.

This paper explores the self as it *appears* to itself and to others online. I argue that perceived reality in social media has as many aspects as there are viewpoints: "*what appears to us*" is comparable to a patchwork in the making.[2] (Fig. 1 illustrates *perceived reality* by means of a token case: "*My school*," as I see it, as my parents see it, & as my teachers see it.) I take "*social media*" to refer to digital communication channels used for engaging in online communication. The perceived self in social media combines local and global viewpoints, being in "grounded" reality (sitting at the computer) and in virtual reality (online).[3] My analysis addresses the problem of rethinking the impact of virtual reality on our grounded selves. The perceived self in social media appears in virtual reality and this latter disempowers the traditional notion of reality as the world around and beyond the self.

---

[1] This paper was presented at the conference: "*Rethinking Intermediality in the Digital Age*," organised by the Sapientia Hungarian University at Cluj-Napoca, 24–26 Oct. 2013. I'd like to thank Boyanka Kornazheva and Plamen Velev for their inadvertent feedback, Maria Katsaridou for helpful insights and the participants in the *Social Media* session for valuable comments and discussion.

[2] Thanks to Boyanka Kornazheva for the *patchwork* metaphor.

I focus on the millenial generation's view – a generation also known in the media as the "Me-Me-Me Generation, whose selfishness technology has only exacerbated."[4] This generation is immersed in virtual reality, yet lives in "grounded" reality. I examine social media mainly used by twixters because that is an age when self-identification is a natural issue. "Millennials are interacting all day but almost entirely through a screen [...]. What they do understand is how to turn themselves into brands, with 'friend' and 'follower' tallies that serve as sales figures," comments *Time* journalist Joel Stein (2013, 3).

The action the perceived self performs on Facebook (from here on abbreviated as FB) is to produce an autobiographical narrative with a likeable protagonist. The narrative's success is measured by the number of "likes" evaluating the perceived self's performance. A well-evaluated self-performance or autobiographical narrative implies that the perceived self is a praised and appreciated self. Online communication allows instant gratification, because technology allows an instant shift from grounded to virtual reality. I argue that the performing self discloses itself online as it would like to be perceived and that this performance has *self-efficacy*, a notion I explain in section 3. The samples from FB cited in what follows, show how a millenial-generation perceived self produces itself in a social space-time as a captivating presence with a credible story action.

The perceived self on FB is an autobiographical self which constructs an online identity through narrative, yet the perceived self in social media is not limited to pictorial narratives.[5] Virtual space simulates closeness by bypassing large physical distances between participants, so communication takes place in a social space unimpeded by the laws of physics (Blasovich and Bailenson 2011, 135). Roughly put, social media reside in a flat, software-made world, which mirrors our habitually perceived reality. The online autobiographical self occurs and evolves in a social space-time where feedback reflects back on its self-perception and on its evolving self-narrative. Here the protagonist has an unfinished temporal structure, just like its author. This is not the case in traditional autobiography, where the protagonist lacks a temporal horizon, unlike its author. As narratologist Marie-Laure Ryan (2006, 78) puts it: "Life is lived looking forward but it is told looking backward. Whether invented or experienced, events are emplotted retrospectively." Autobiographical selves in virtual space-time break this rule because they co-exist with their grounded selves in physical space-time. In section 4, below, I give examples of virtual selves whose storyline and timeline diverges from their grounded selves, because virtual selves are uncontrollable and leave non-erasable traces.

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[3] On the use of "*grounded*" reality, see Blascovich & Bailenson (2011, 22–24, 29, 54).

[4] Cf. Stein (2013, 1–2): "Millennials consist, depending on whom you ask, of people born from 1980 to 2000. […] In the U.S., millennials are the children of baby boomers, who are also known as the Me Generation, who then produced the Me Me Me Generation, whose selfishness technology has only exacerbated." Cf. also Ben Agger's (2004) definition of the virtual self: "the person connected to the world and to others through electronic means such as the Internet, television, and cell phones. Virtuality is the experience of being online and using computers; it […] refer[s] to a particular way of experiencing and interacting with the world." I discuss the perceived self in social media, which I take as equivalent to the virtual self in a social structure. Unlike Agger, however, I avoid post-Marxist ideology.

[5] Thus algorithm-controlled avatars can take on whatever shapes the grounded self has in mind and act out the latter's desires in online worlds like *Second Life*.

The perceived self in social media is a narrator with a point of view, expressed explicitly or implicitly. An autobiographical self is a first-person narrator who is both author and protagonist of her narrative. Points of view belong to a mindset. Philosopher of language Hector-Neri Castañeda (1983) developed this 'mindset' notion with the double connection between singular reference and objects in the world. "Every utterance expressing a thought (whether believed or not) is in principle and at bottom subordinated to an implicit *I think that* (or, even, to an *I say that*)" (1983, 60).[6] Self-perceived reality depends on the viewer's perspective, expressed by the first person (*who*, namely *the self*) at a certain time (*when*), in a certain place (*where*) and in a certain socio-cultural context (*from* or *in which*) it relates to things. These markers coordinate the telling and showing of an event or action by denoting its spatio-temporal position (the *content* or data to be interpreted) and serve as guidelines for an addressee ("*you*") – virtual or grounded.[7]

FB is the context of the self's perceived reality, the content of which is patched together by an online self in relation with itself and other online selves. This self is a multifaceted doublet of "*I*" and "*you*," with a double connection between "I" and the objects it refers to (Castañeda 1983, 60–62). In my view, the peculiarity of the perceived self on FB is that it has five roles, meshing grounded and virtual self:

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[6] The double connection of *oratio obliqua* and *oratio recta*, as well as Bühler's work on imagination-oriented deixis and free shiftability is examined by François Recanati (2007), in *Perspectival Thought*.

[7] According to psycholinguists Bühler (1934), Fillmore (1997), Jakobson (1972), Lyons (1975) these are the deictic coordinates of subjective orientation. I examine this in Kasabova (2010).

(i) The perceived self as it appears to itself (a protagonist in the first person)

(ii) The perceived self as narrator in the first person (an autobiographical self)

(iii) The perceived self in the third-person (an interpersonal self as it appears to others, a participant in a virtual audience)

(iv) The perceived self as protagonist in the second person (a projected self, as it would like to be perceived)

(v) The perceived self as the author (sitting in front of its computer and virtually, as a gossip and trickster)

These five roles map across and correspond to Neisser's (1993) five types of self-knowledge on which my analysis is based. Neisser's (1993) typology of the perceived self divides into 5 types of self-knowledge. (1) the ecological self, which is the embodied self in the physical world and in regard to their immediate environment – the author. (2) the interpersonal self or the relation of the self to other people – the audience. (3) The temporally extended self – the narrator, (4) the private or self-reflective self, and (5) the conceptual or assumptive self.

1. How the Five Types of Self-Perception Appear in Social Media

"When you practice for your profile pic" (Fig. 2) is an instance of self-perceived reality online, reframed by Tumblr-hosted community "*When you live in Sofia*," Sofia's best humor blog.[8] I argue that perceived reality in social media is not just virtual, but social and interpersonal. I assume that the main roles of the perceived self are intertwined and I reorder them for the purpose of this study: (1) the self-reflective self, namely the self's own perception of itself or, as Neisser calls it, the private self (the protagonist in the first person); (2) the temporally extended self or perceived self-in-process – an autobiographical self with an idealistic narrator; (3) the interpersonal self – engaged in, and receiving feedback from, a social world – and (4) the conceptual or assumptive self which is a projectable and possible self – as it would like to be perceived. From these four types follows (5) Neisser's "ecological" self which inhabits two niches: i) the physical world, as a grounded self in front of a computer and ii) in the virtual world as a gossip and trickster.

The self as it would like to be perceived, (4), is expressed either in the indicative (conditional) or the subjunctive. The self in Fig. 2 expresses what would be the case if it were perceived as it should be. It is an appellative self-perceived self which wants to appear likeable and to reveal itself to its prospective public as a seductive *persona*, for the self-perceived self in online networks is an alluring self. Hence I propose the following interpretation of Fig. 2: "If I am seen online, I should look cute, so I have to practice for my profile pic." Namely, the self as it wishes to be perceived – and in order to achieve that effect, the self-reflective self (1) has work to do, to appear as a believable projected self (4). This is the explicit self-reflective self. In addition, the self-reflective self has a sense of humor and pokes fun at itself in indirect speech. The internal structure of the perceived self is expressed in both direct and indirect speech, as a self-reflective and projected/projectable self.

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[8] See: *https://www.facebook.com/WhenYouLiveInSofia*. (Last accessed 24. 09. 2014.) This blog shares funny clips which are emblematic of life in Sofia – from falling down a shaft on the street or being overfed by your nan, to despair about the ever-rising electricity costs and puns about the government.

1.1. The Perceived Self and Its *"I-Guises"*

Castañeda (1983) develops the idea that the self has guises – perceived appearances, aspects, and postures and that these guises offer a double connection between singular reference and objects in the world: there is a double relation between word and thought on one hand, and thought and thing, on the other.[9] The connection between "I" and things is twofold, secured by *oratio obliqua* and *oratio recta*, respectively.[10] While indirect speech implicitly expresses the self's appeal or what it wants to communicate, direct speech explicitly expresses the relation between a grammatical subject and an action in a predicative statement. These statements have an underlying attributive act, such as: "I think here now" or, in our case, "I want here now to be seen as" – which is explicitly expressed by: "you're really awesome."

Consider Fig. 3 "A hard life makes you strong," from Bulgarian twixter communities "Bully, so that they'll respect you" and "I don't care about your opinion."[11] The implicit message is "I want here & now to be seen as suffering," so that your hard life is appreciated by your peers (the audience). *Oratio obliqua* shows it is their appreciation or appraisal which makes you strong. The explicit message is that character-building experiences are painful and this is a necessary premiss for making you strong. If you're strong, you'll be respected, is expressed in *oratio recta*. The perceived reality of the image below shows

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[9] The issue can be traced back to Aristotle (*De Int.* I, 16a1–9).

[10] This view is shared by Castañeda (1983) and Bühler (1929) and taken up (to some extent) by Recanati (2007).

[11] Published on two websites: *https://www.FB.com/MackajZaDaTeUvazavat* and August 2013 timeline picture of *https://www.FB.com/pages/Не-Ме-Интересува-Мнението-Ви-/305615402903995*. Last accessed 24. 09. 2014.

– both verbally and non-verbally – that respect has to be earned. Hence the message: “you need to prove your worth by beeing seen as having a hard life, on the rocks, at the seaside, your head clasped in your hand.” This self-perceived reality is what Castañeda calls a thin slice of a chunk of reality or “*I-guise*” of a vulnerable but strong twixter.[12]

According to Castañeda, “every statement lies implicitly, or explicitly, in *oratio obliqua* (indirect speech), and the only true or genuine *oratio recta* (direct speech) is the unspoken *I think* [...] or, rather, *I think here now.* [...] This has momentous consequences for the subject of experience” (1983, 60–61). The subject of experience is the perceived self in its aspects (1) and (4) and the double connection to things is via *oratio recta* and *oratio obliqua*. Hence this self is a thin slice of a chunk of reality which Castañeda names *I-guise*: “A self (conceived as the referent of an indexical use of the first-person pronoun) is not a whole person or total chunk of reality [...]; (2) a self is a thin “slice” of such a chunk; (3) it is a “slice” (hereafter called an *I-guise*) that consists of being a subject of an experience (whether perceptual or one involving non-perceptual thinking); (4) secondary *I-guises* are potential subjects of experience; (5) an actual I-guise is a present, presented-to and self-presented subject;” (1983, 61).

Castañeda’s “*I-guises*” correspond to Neisser’s aspects of the perceived self. An actual I-guise is a present-presented-to and self-presented subject – corresponding to Neisser’s (1) the self-reflective or private self which a subject of an experience involving perceptual or non-perceptual thinking which overlaps with (4) the assumptive self which in turn overlaps with Castañeda’s (2) secondary *I-guise* or subject of a potential experience [Fig. 4]. “Only my daughter will be better than me! J” is a good example: the perceived self projects itself into its future, in a bridal outfit, with a daughter dressed as a bridesmaid. The perceived self (*secondary I-guise*) is a potential bride with a potential daughter. Both of them are studying their reflections in a mirror – needless to add, reflections are also projections, albeit self-presented ones. “Only my daughter will be better than me! J” is an image on the face-book site of Millenials’ community “*Damn it, I need you!!*”[13] *Oratio obliqua* expresses the subject’s wishful thinking here & now (in a specious present) – how it would like its future or potential self to be, in the *I guise* of a bride who can be eclipsed only by her future daughter in the *you-guise* of a potential bride (a bride’s *maid*). *Oratio recta* expresses the actual and self-reflective *I-guise* in the future tense: “only my daughter will be better than me” – the future tense of the assumed self or secondary *I-guise*. The actual and secondary I-guises correspond to Neisser’s (2) temporally extended autobiographical self. Castañeda says that there is an overlap between the self-reflective self, the specious or temporally extended self, the assumptive or potential self, and the identification of *I-guises*. “(6) its identification with past or future selves […]; (7) […] the time of an experience is a specious present (referred to indexically as now), […]” (1983, 62).

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[12] *Twixter* is a term coined by *Time* magazine and used by Joel Stein (2013, 3) to describe millenials “who prolong a lifestage between teenager and adult.”

[13] “Мамка му, трябваш ми” at *https://www.FB.com/trqbvash.mi.* Last accessed 24. 09. 2014.

The distinctive feature of an autobiographical self is its temporal extension or continuity spanning from what is to what was and what will be. The time of the autobiographical self is that of a temporally continuous experience in an extended present, referred to indexically as *now*, as Castañeda points out. This temporally continuous perceived self is extended (or perduring) because it bridges from the present across to the past and future. The autobiographical self perceives reality in a ‘specious present’ (W. James 1890). The temporally continuous self knows the past mainly on the basis of episodic memory and some semantic memory, as well as the future self of our expectations. Thus the perceived self in the “only my daughter can be better than me” *I-guise* can project a possible self from its present to its future, by means of epistemic data (*knowledge*) acquired in its personal past (about brides and bridesmaids, for instance).

The flaw in Castañeda’s account is the absence of Neisser’s self in relation to other people (3). In my view, the interpersonal self is crucial for relating the various *I-guises* because it is a source of self-knowledge within the social environment based on perceptual information. Castañeda mentions what could correspond to Neisser’s “ecological self,” namely “(9) purely physical objects are systems of physical guises;” and we shall test his claim that “one and the same relation glues all guises together, whether physical or mental, or *I-guises* […]” (1983, 62). I presume that this *I-guises* glue is partly composed of the interpersonal self and self-efficacy.

Besides the first-person point of view in social media, an important factor is the third-person perspective, because in social media the self is also perceived from an observer’s perspective: she sees herself from her laptop or tablet connected to the web and logged into the social network. This is a tertiary *I-guise*, corresponding to Neisser’s interpersonal self (3). The observer *I-guise* is not in the scene, although she is experiencing it and self-identifying with it. Hence the interpersonal self overlaps with the other *I-guises* and contributes perceptual information to self-awareness and self-knowledge of perceived reality, anchoring the other *I-guises* in a social context.

How the Interpersonal Self Can Affect the Possible (or Conceptual) Self

Expounding Neisser's notion, Daniel Stern (1993, 212) argues that the interpersonal self has two aspects, subjective and objective, respectively. In a similar vein, I take the conceptual, assumptive or possible self (4) as a doublet, comprising a projectable and a projected self, using the interpersonal self as interface between the possible (its mindset) and the virtually-actual (its online presence). I think the projectable self has a (grammatical) subject: a possible self, actualized in its online projection, whence it provides a feedback which enhances its self-concept. This projected subject provides reassuring feedback to the conceptual or assumptive self via the interpersonal self. Consider the American social network "*I know I'm 'awesome,' so I don't care about your 'opinion'*." One of the profile pictures shows a hand pointing at the viewer – i.e. the self-perceived self – with the question: "who is the most awesome person today?" [see Fig. 5]. The self-perceived subject receives a reassuring feedback for its possible self: "you are the most awesome person today."

The image can be found on the FB page of a fan community. Thence its interpersonal message spreads its reassurance to self-reflective selves online, allaying their self-doubts and enhancing their self-value in a participatory culture, through spreadable media. For social networking is a cultural practice well supported by fan culture (Jenkins 2013, 9). In addition, social networking is a source of interpersonal knowledge – such as knowing that one is the most awesome person today – which is how that spreadable content affects the perceived self in social media. The perceived storyline on this network acts as a catalyst for a different fan community: the community of the perceived self in various *I-guises*, from the interpersonal to the possible perceived self. In such a community, says Jenkins (2013, 151–3), consumers are becoming producers because they are engaged in meaningful participation – writing readers, or picture-taking viewers – perceived selves in an interactive reality. An important consequence is that, due to the interpersonal self, the perceived self has acquired new dimensions: it has become a multiversal self in the virtual 2D space of a participatory culture.

In addition, interpersonal self-knowledge is crucial for the perceived self because it is the perceptually based knowledge of a self in interaction with others. Today, face to face interaction with a social partner occurs online and in real time (via Skype). It seems that, for twixters at least, interaction with social partners in social media is a near equivalent to face to face interaction. First, because they usually communicate in a shared social space with members of their ecological and social niche. Second, because social partners in social media usually share the same values (since they elected or liked the same network), focus on the same events, objects, or interests, and self-evaluate with regard to their peers on the network. Consequently, the interpersonal self is important for self-recognition, which involves detecting social responses to self-actions.

Via the interpersonal self, the conceptual self receives a relational affect about its perceived status. According to Stern (1993, 206–7), the interpersonal self has a register of so-called categorical affects, such as happiness, sadness, anger, or surprise and these can change over time. Here the temporally extended self comes in, as an autobiographical self with an idealistic narrator connecting the dots of its past and present *personae*. Part of the interpersonal self's affect-register are relational affects: "feelings of being loved, esteemed, thought wonderful, special or hated, and the feelings of being secure, safe, attached, alone, isolated or separated. These feelings [...] occupy a significant place [...] in research on motivation" (Stern 1993, 207). They are interpersonal feelings arising "in the course of coordinated interactions" and they "push the limits of the interpersonal self, and thus help define its boundaries" (1993, 201).

Consider Fig. 6. "I am simply a person and I make countless mistakes, but you have no right to judge me, because it's my life," from the twixter network "Damn it, I need you."[14] A black-and-white photograph of a texting girl, presumably texting this missive, either to her *bff* or her boyfriend.

Interpersonal feelings arise in the course of an interaction coordinated between the interpersonal self, the possible self, the self-reflective self, and the autobiographical self – or the observer, actual and possible *I-guises*. These three are represented in the image, echoing the interpersonal self's affective mindset – feeling misunderstood and depreciated and hence motivated to justify her assumed stance. The actual and possible self are projected in a virtual handshake: the actual private self, in its doublet aspects expressed by the active and passive voice.

The private self has two aspects, active and passive, respectively: an active self-reflective self saying "I am a person" is judged in a projected passive voice – a judgment the self-reflective self rejects: "you have no right to judge me." The perceived self's motivation lies in the projection of an intimately private self-reflective awareness which is suffering from a harsh judgment. Seen online, the suffering is half as bad, because it is no longer passive but becomes self-effective, due to the observer's *I-guise*, or the projected interpersonal self which is virtually extended into a social space. The self-reflective and interpersonal self are in their turn interwoven with the temporally extended self which is an autobiographical self.

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[14] "Мамка му, трябваш ми" at *https://www.FB.com/trqbvash.mi* (98982 likes on 06. 08. 2013). Last accessed 24. 09. 2014.

The autobiographical self is represented as an author/narrator, observed by the interpersonal self, but it too, is a doublet. On one hand, it is framed online as an autobiographical narrator from the observer's third-person *I* guise. On the other hand, the temporally extended self accounts for the sameness of a sense of self across the time-space between the online projection and the actual projectable self tapping its tablet (or laptop) whilst looking at the screen. This autobiographical self creates its own self (-profile) in a social network, actively participating in consumption (Jenkins 2013, 153).

I suppose the perceived self's online time is analogous to dream-time (except that the perceived self is in waking time), since sequences of events can flash by in a few minutes and, vice versa, what appears as a fleeting glance online may last for an hour. There appears to be a difference in speed between the perceived self's online time and offline time, although, empirically speaking, they should be running at the same speed. The persistence and continuity of that sameness of the perceived self spans across time-space(s) since the perceived self is a self-in-process. Its extended self-awareness is a necessary condition for putting in order psychical and virtual events. This hybrid self-awareness is warranted by a causal and a semantic link between the self, its actions and its episodes – it's spatio-temporally self-effective parts and its temporal parts.

Self-Efficacy and the Perceived Self's Hero-Paradox

Self-efficacy is explained by an interaction between the self-reflective self, the autobiographical self, and the interpersonal self. Self-efficacy determines the self's motivational process: for a self to be a motivated self, it needs to notice the relation between its own actions and changes resulting from those actions (EID 2009, 453). The perceived self in social media can construct this causal link by means of its interacting *I-guises.* The temporally extended autobiographical self does a self-reflective repair-job, intertwined with the interpersonal self. The autobiographical self does this by means of its protagonist in the second person – "you" as you would like to be perceived. My claim is corroborated by Josephine Rydberg-Lidén and Mathias Noschis's (2013) research on online audience response and the impact of participatory experience on virtual audience. They found that the impact occurs on an interpersonal level and that the bottom line of individual motivation is that you can affect things – self-efficacy.

Consider Fig. 7: “I hope you always find a reason to smile” is the message written across a screen showing a lovely, pensive, and unsmiling girl. This image is a profile picture belonging to a Bulgarian twixter network called “Keep quiet and don’t get on my nerves” – half-quoting a song by pop-folk singer Galena (2010).[15] This autobiographical self’s narrator is an idealist with an interpersonal counterpart to its self-reflective self – the wounded beauty framed by half-drawn blinds in an umber (or umbrageous) limelight. The projected self is the protagonist in the second person, as it would like to be seen (and comforted). The comforting message: “I hope you always find a reason to smile” is seen by the interpersonal observer-self, from the third-person guise, written by a self-narrator who knows how to heal the “you” protagonist’s wounds. The autobiographical consumer-author participates and consents by “liking” this image.

The paradox underlying the perceived self’s efficacy is that the motivated self is an appraised self – even if the appraisal comes from a self-perceived source – the likes. Hence the virtual self perceives itself as an agent of a perceived change (a self-efficacious self) in the context of the social media in which it actively participates. Moreover, an appraised self is a hero in the second person. Its performance has to be appraised by the self-reflective self and the interpersonal self, so that its value is secured by a social environment in “the warm embrace of praise,” as twixter blogger Stephanie Sparer writes in *“‘Likes’ crazy*” (2011). The perceived self on FB wants to feel the warm embrace of praise, because it feels like a proverbial underdog and wants to feel like a hero. “I keep forgetting my life is about me. Not what other people think of me,” writes Sparer (2011).

The perceived self’s hero-paradox, seen in images 3, 6, and 7 also indicates that the perceived self wants to be admired as an underdog. The caption to Fig. 3 showing a girl at the rocky seaside, that reads “A hard life makes you strong!!,” asks the underdog to be brave for its audience. Fig. 6 reads “I am simply a person and I make countless mistakes, but you have no right to judge me, because it’s my life.” It is an underdog pleading for her right to be heard on a website from the viewpoint of a perceived self as an underdog-website called “Bully so that they’ll respect you.” Fig. 7 appeals “I hope you always find a reason to smile” on behalf of the underdog. The underdog-hero may be a distinctive 21st Century feature of the perceived self in media and literature – an urban nomad, slippery, and mercurial, narcissistic and appealing. Fig. 4, “Only my daughter will be better than me!," is emblematic of this stance. The underdog is a young hero – where "young" is a mindset rather than a biological fact – and a negotiator. The self as hero is the "market value" of the main character of the autobiographical self. If the protagonist is appraised as heroic, then it is revealed as an "I don't care about your opinion"–guise because it has received a cognitive and social sanction.[16] Hence the Bulgarian twixter website has chosen an appropriate name for possible selves that in *oratio obliqua* would like to be seen as not caring about others' opinion, while the *oratio recta* expresses their nonchalance.

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[15] *https://www.FB.com/pages/Тихо-ми-пазии-по-нервите-ми-не-лази/114280678614491* The page was created on 31st January 2013. Galena’s song is called “Тихо ми пази и стискай устни” – “Keep quiet and press your lips together.” Last accessed 24. 09. 2014.

In a double twist on this moniker, Janky Ror's fanclub page is called "I know I'm 'awesome,' so I don't care about your 'opinion'" The quotation marks around "awesome" and "opinion" signal that this is a received view. An informed interpersonal self knows that it should be called awesome and therefore it does not care about any "opinion" expressed from a second-person-viewpoint, for peer-evaluation is phrased from a third-person-stance. The perceived self's hero paradox: "I don't care about your opinion" explicitly states an underdog's point of view and implicitly sustains an appeal for appraisal and appreciation – so there is no cognitive dissonance between what the perceived self does and believes. Rather, it wants to be acknowledged as a hero in the *I-guise* of an underdog and combine the self-reflective and autobiographically projected "me" with the interpersonal self in the social context of "what others think about me." Fig . 2, "When you practice for your profile pic," illustrates this point with a sense of humor, another distinctive feature of the millenial generation.

Perceived Self Deviations: "I-Guise" Thieves and Fake FB Profiles

The downside of the hero-paradox is that the perceived self's desire to be seen and appreciated leaves digital traces which are exploited by others and used for "reality mining" or tracking people's data in order to identify predictable patterns of behavior. Blascovich and Bailenson (2011, 133–135; 154–164) use the term "digital footprints" for the virtual traces our virtual selves leave on the web. Digital footprints provide clues about the self and reveal things about its physical and psychological identity. They are used for database marketing: predicting the self's actions and response, determining the grounded self's identity and personality, collecting, tracking, and brokering their consumer habits. Consequently, in using social media we are actively helping corporate interests. In addition, today our personal data are digital collectibles easily mined by third-parties (Marwick 2014).

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[16] *https://www.FB.com/pages/Не-Ме-Интересува-Мнението-Ви-/305615402903995*. Last accessed 24. 09. 2014.

Digital footprints also foster abuse. Consider Bianca Bosker, a girl whose FB identity was stolen by someone who created a virtual "Bianca Bosker" identity [see Fig. 8]. She writes: "When I finally scoped out this new Bosker [...] I found myself staring back at me" (Bosker 2012). The desire to be seen can rebound unexpectedly: one day you realize that you're being watched and that the information you provided online has been mined and used by others. "Why would someone fake being me – and then friend the real me?" Bosker asks (2012). Performance artist Daiimah Mubashshir has a reply: "FB and Google are not at all interested in recreating identity. I think that these are businesses profiting from data gathering, so the identity piece is just a selling point to keep its users interested." [17] Mubashshir has two FB profiles (see Fig. 9a): one for her current self, which includes her theater work about being black and lesbian in an Islamic environment, and another for her "old" self, for family and friends, who are not familiar with her work.

Although FB has a real world name policy, many virtual selves on FB are not matched to a grounded user in a way that their author or audience would recognize. Bosker's and Mubashshir's fake profiles both involve name-using practices depending on a producer-consumer relation: Bosker is a consumer who doesn't know the impostor-producer of her fake FB, while Mubashshir is the producer of two FB identities for two different consumer groups which do not recognize her complete identity. Both FB "I-guises" use pseudonyms, but the conditions and motives of this usage are very different (Genette 1987, 50–55). The impostor of the virtual Bianca Bosker profile plagiarizes a grounded identity without the latter's permission and no right of ownership. The producer of two different FB profiles, on the other hand signs them with two names she owns, to avoid being evaluated by the wrong audience. Her reason for having fake FB profiles is that full disclosure isn't an option (Eler 2012).

Consumer-writer Alicia Eler (2012) provides another reason for creating a fake FB profile: "Just for Laughs" [see Figure 9b]. *"Baumshaquita* (*Baum* for short) is not a real person. She is a sketch comedy character that I created and sometimes refer to as my 'alter ego.'" A real author and grounded self produces an imaginary pseudo-self with some attributes different from the author's: "One time she not-so-subtly hit on the person that I was dating. Baum is a general disrupter and Internet loudmouth [...]. She knows a lot of folks that I don't."

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[17] See: *http://readwrite.com/2012/01/23/why_people_have_fake_facebook_profiles.* Last accessed 24. 09. 2014.

A further reason for creating a fake FB profile could be that you're underage: pre-teens are on FB without complying with the terms of service because they like to play games and communicate online. However, the incongruence between grounded self and virtual self may not be due to fake FB profiles. As mentioned above, a virtual self leaves digital footprints. Those traces remain, even if the grounded self tied to them no longer exists: consider FB profiles of deceased users which outlive them as virtual memorials, unless family members have submitted a request to deactivate the account.[18]

Against Technoconsumerism and Social Media

Last, rethinking the perceived self in social media also involves critiques, such as Dave Eggers's (2013) satire on social media, *The Circle*. Voted "most admired company four years running," the Circle is a social media corporation combining FB, Google, Twitter, Paypal, Pinternet and others. "There were no more passwords, no multiple identities. Your devices knew what you were and your own identity […] was the person paying, signing up, responding, viewing and reviewing, seeing and being seen. You had to use your real name, and this was tied to your credit cards, your bank and thus paying for anything was simple. One button for the rest of your life online" (Eggers 2013, 20–21).

The novel mocks the impact of social media on the perceived self, showing how the protagonist, Mae, becomes immersed in the Circle's virtual reality as she battles to increase her participation scores an appraisals. Besides, *The Circle* is a case of transmedial *metalepsis*, because it transgresses textual and extratextual boundaries. The author jumps across diegetic (narrative) worlds, combining textual, intratextual, and extratextual levels: first, social media is given a new context in the novel. Second, the author-reader relation spans across the text whose storyline and storyworld parodies social media. The world in which one tells is shifted to the world of which one tells and thus the author manipulates the causal relation between himself, his work, the subject and the audience (Genette 2004, 14; 27; 31).

The movie *Disconnect* (H. Rubin, 2012) is another case of *transmedial metalepsis*, expounding the consequences of communication technology and how it affects our relationships. *Disconnect* is about the dangers of social media and the impact of virtual reality on our daily lives: an ambitious journalist sees a career-making story in a teen that performs on a chat-room stripper site. A teenager attempts suicide after being bullied by a fake FB identity created by his classmates. After losing their child, a couple stalks the suspect who stole their identity online. Last but not least, my paper could also be seen as a case of *transmedial metalepsis*: I'm talking about the perceived self in FB-powered reality, jump across to critiques of the perceived self in social media, and cross the textual and intratextual boundaries by communicating it with extratextual readers.

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[18] See: *http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/12/07/death-facebook-dead-profiles_n_2245397.html.* Last accessed 24. 09. 2014.

Conclusion

This paper is an attempt to re-think the perceived self in social media, analyzing the various aspects of that self or *I-guise*. A spin-off from my analysis reveals what child psychologists call the social contingency detection (EID 2009, 446–449). On this view, infants develop a sense of self only if they can construe a sense of reciprocity with others and a sense of participation in a socio-cultural context. Our perceived self's sense of self depends on its possibility to detect matches between its actions and the wishes and reflections presented by its self-aspects or *I-guises*. Perhaps the projected self "you, as you would like to be perceived" matches perceptually based knowledge of interacting with others in a narrative by an autobiographical self seeking to appreciate itself in the eyes of others. The perceived self in social media wants to detect a matching of its self-appreciation with social appraisal – in an online mirror, so to speak. This virtual mirror is the perceived self's means to an end, because it affectively biases responses (the likes) while the self notes the effect of its behavior. Detection of social contingency is a work in process and the perceived self is a project to be continued.

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List of Figures

Figure 1. “My school.” An example of perceived reality from Bulgarian teen FB page “*long live the uneducated*.”

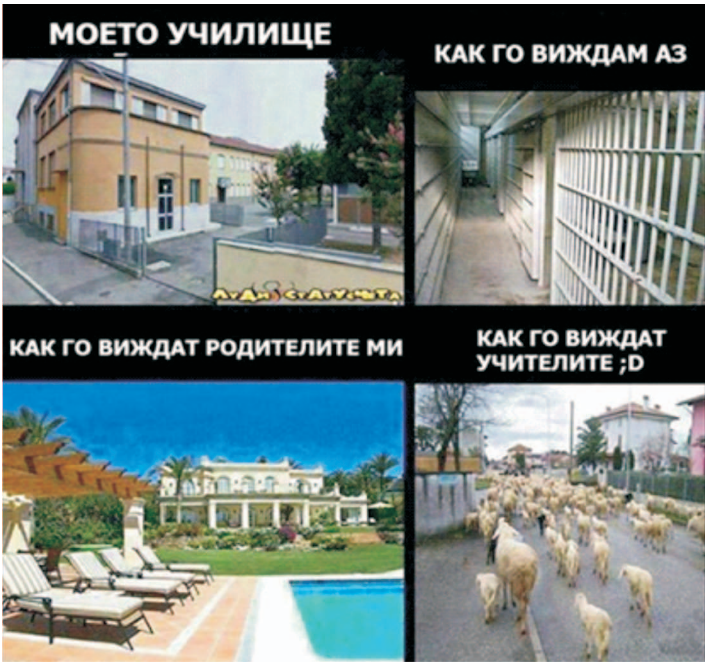

МОЕТО УЧИЛИЩЕ
КАК ГО ВИЖДАМ АЗ
КАК ГО ВИЖДАТ РОДИТЕЛИТЕ МИ
КАК ГО ВИЖДАТ УЧИТЕЛИТЕ ;D

Figure 2. When you practice for your profile pic – a pun on the self-reflective self as it would like to be perceived.

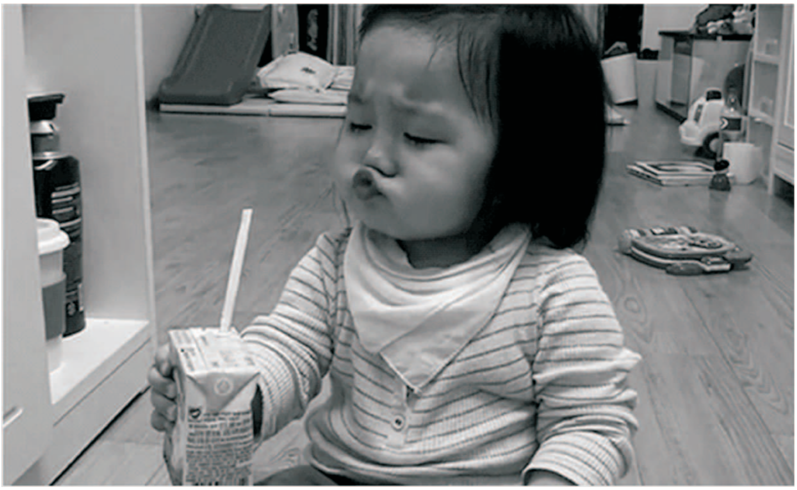


Figure 3. "A hard life makes you strong !!" A twixter '*I-guise*.'

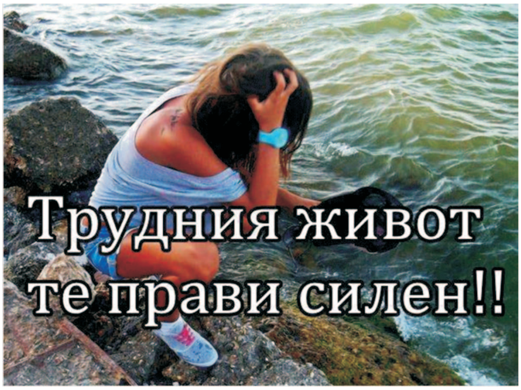

Трудния живот
те прави силен!!

Figure 4. "Only my daughter will be better than me! J"

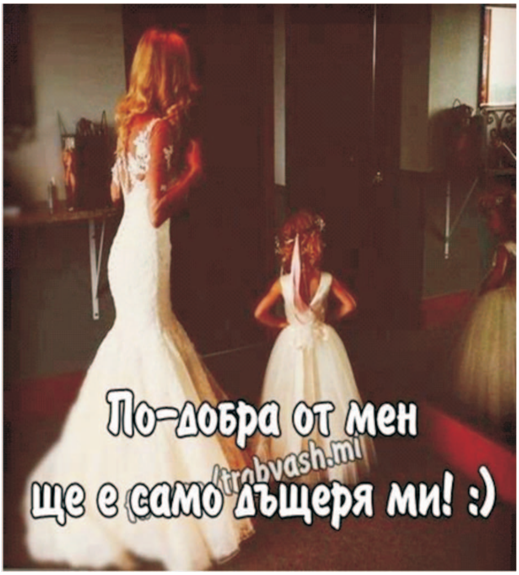

По-добра от мен
ще е само дъщеря ми! :)
trabvash.mi

Figure 5. “Who is the most awesome person today?” – how the interpersonal self affects the possible self.

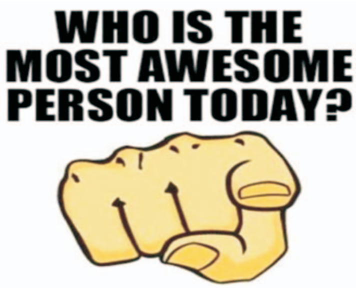

WHO IS THE
MOST AWESOME
PERSON TODAY?

Figure 6. “I am simply a person and I make countless mistakes, but you have no right to judge me, because it’s my life.”

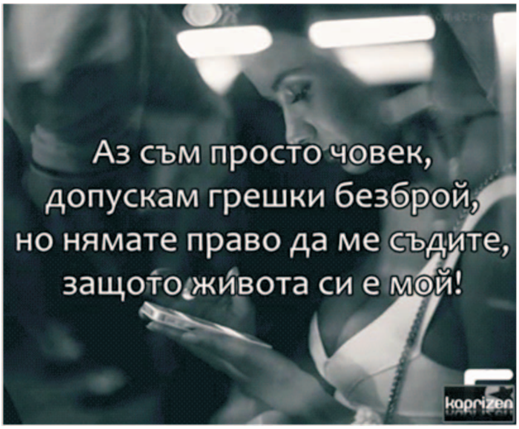

Аз съм просто човек,
допускам грешки безброй,
но нямате право да ме съдите,
защото живота си е мой!
kaprizen

Figure 7. “I hope you always find a reason to smile” – says the autobiographical self’s narrator to the self-reflective self and the interpersonal self via the projected self.

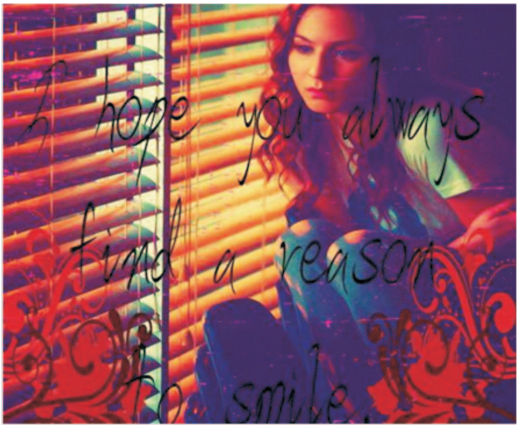

I hope you always
find a reason
to smile.

Figure 8. “*I-guise*” thief (Bianca Bosker, 2012).

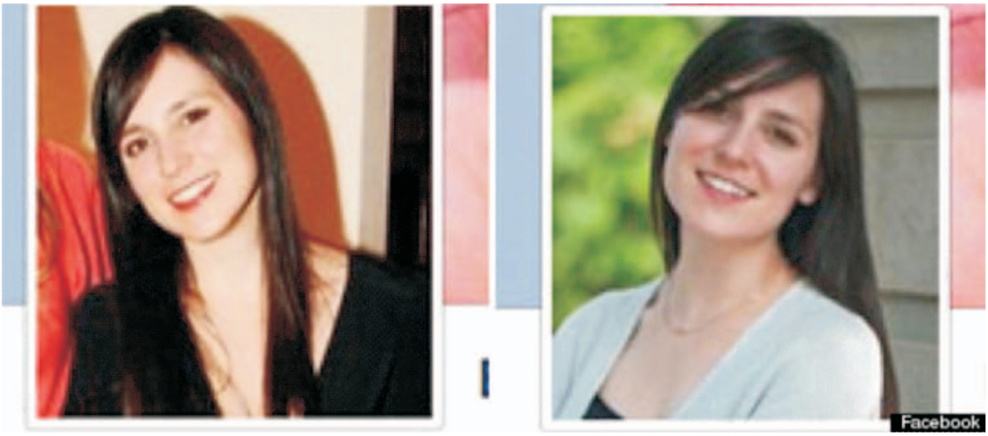
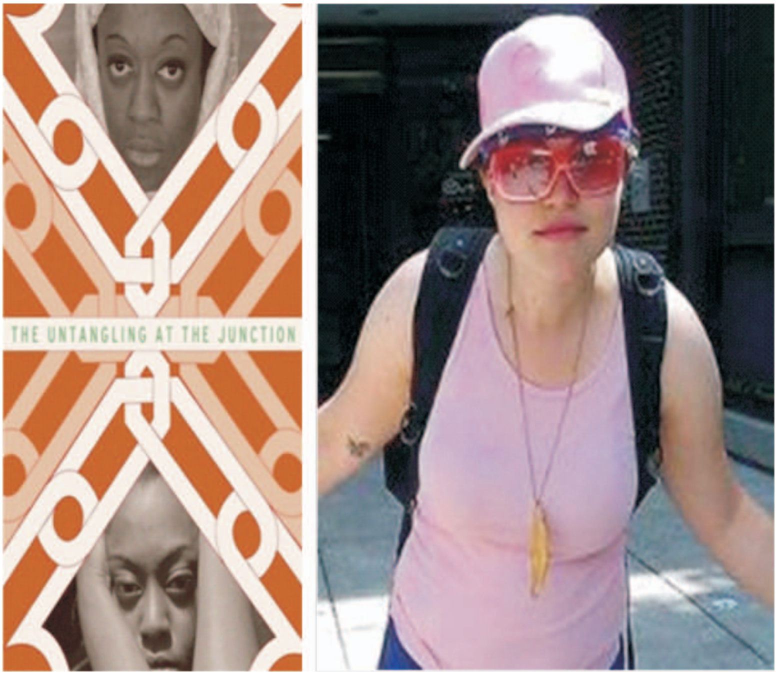


Figure 9. Fake FB profiles: “*I-guises*” with shifty origins.


THE UNTANGLING AT THE JUNCTION

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Brand Identity, Adaptation, and Media Franchise Culture

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Abstract. In spite of the noticeable practices within the field of Adaptation, Adaptation theory seems to be lagging behind whilst perpetuating various fallacies. Geoffrey Wagner's types of Adaptation and Kamilla Elliott's proposed concepts for examining adaptations have proved useful but due to their general applicability they seem to perpetuate the fallacies existing within the field of Adaptation. This article will propose a context-specific concept pertaining to Media Franchise Culture for the purpose of examining Adaptations and re-assessing long-held debates concerning the Original, the Content/Form debate and Fidelity issues that cater to the twelve fallacies discussed by Thomas Leitch.

Keywords: brand identity, media franchise culture, adaptation, superheroes, and branded entertainment.

Brand Identity, consisting of a Core and Extended Identity in addition to Brand Equity offer a new perspective from which to view adaptations whilst taking into consideration narrative media alongside elements that have been ignored such as the Industry and consumer audiences. While Brand Identity theory is capable of tackling all twelve fallacies, focus will be placed on the issue of fidelity in juxtaposition to the new angle offered by the Core, instead of an original text, and the Extended Identity instead of content/form.

In his insightful 2003 article, *Twelve Fallacies in Contemporary Adaptation Theory*, Thomas M. Leitch discusses the twelve fallacies pertaining to adaptation theory and successfully highlights that, in regards to contemporary adaptation theory, the "flood of study of individual adaptations proceeds on the whole without the support of any more general theoretical account of what actually happens, or what ought to happen, when a group of filmmakers set out to adapt a literary text" (2003, 149). He goes on to examine fallacies pertaining to media characteristics between novels and films, their mode of representation, their narrative capabilities, their status as intertexts, and matters of originality. What this article will focus on are two fallacies which are interrelated and essentially occur due to the very practice of Adaptation. Both the notions of the novel being better than the film as well as the persistence that “fidelity is the most appropriate criterion to use in analyzing adaptations” cater to the degree of faithfulness an adaptation displays towards its original, meanwhile fueling debates regarding the aforementioned fallacies, whilst simultaneously acting as the point of reference when examining these fallacies (Leitch 2003, 161). The “which is better” debate of Adaptation theory as a question disregards vital aspects of the industry[1] and the collaborative production process, not to mention the possible conflicting interests of licensor and licensee parties[2] as well as the reception of consumer audiences. While Geoffrey Wagner may have been one of the first to identify three helpful types of adaptation, and Kamilla Elliott has successfully informed us of the proposed concepts employed to examine the form/content debate, in truth and concurrence with Leitch the notion of fidelity “is a hopelessly fallacious measure of a given adaptation’s value because it is unattainable, undesirable, and theoretically possible only in a trivial sense” (2003, 161). Instead, Linda Hutcheon’s proposition is more accurate, more inclusive of the various notions pertaining to fallacies and takes into account the element of practice.

Initially by viewing an adaptation as a formal entity, or product, one realizes that an adaptation is “an announced and extensive transposition of a particular work or works” whereby the element of “‘transcoding’ can involve a shift in medium, or a change of frame and therefore context” (Hutcheon 2006, 7–8). The second perspective views adaptation as “a process of creation” due to the fact that the process of adaptation involves “both (re-) interpretation and then (re-) creation” (2006, 8). Finally, an adaptation needs to be viewed from “its process of reception” because it is “a form of intertextuality: we experience adaptations as palimpsests through our memory of other works that resonate through repetition with variation” (2006, 8). In an attempt to avoid repeating the fallacies Leitch refers to, this article wishes to propose a concept for the examination of adaptations within a specific context instead of offering a concept that would be considered generally applicable. The context in question is that of Media Franchise Culture and the concept is that of Brand Identity theory, which can act as a model in the examination of adaptations, whilst re-evaluating long-held views, pertaining to fallacies, such as the notion of the original, the content/form debate and the issue of fidelity. Media franchise culture[3] is an area where one needs to re-evaluate what and how an I.P. is being adapted in juxtaposition with traditional notions of Adaptation theory. Cross-distribution of narratives, trans-media storytelling, media convergence, and intertextuality are not only evident but dominating practical applications in the creation of franchises. The context Adaptation theory finds itself in, therefore, is not one of simply transferring the novel to a film, nor is it about questioning whether content can be separated from form, or if the adaptation is faithful to the original. Regarding form and content, the phenomenon of media convergence distinctly displays and is predicated on the fact that content is dispersed across media platforms and trans-media storytelling complements this phenomenon by drawing attention to the fact that it is not about faithfully adapting but extending the experience of narrative by way of a multimedia construct as in the cases of Joss Whedon's *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997–2003) and the Wachowski brothers' *The Matrix* (1999, 2003). Franchise storytelling culture offers an array of multi-texts, multimedia, and merchandise centred on narratives, characters, or worlds, that are formulated based on brand marketing strategies[4] aiming to offer a total entertainment experience (Grainge 2008, 54). An appropriate concept, or model, that can be employed in order to examine adaptations that occur within a Media Franchise Culture is that of Brand Identity seeing that what is adapted is ultimately either a Brand Character, or a Brand World.[5]

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[1] See Johnson: “As opposed to an operation emulating vertical integration, the media franchise frequently aims for horizontal organization and cooperation” (2009 47, 53).

[2] See Grainge: “Branding, [Celia Lury] suggests, emerges as an increasingly significant production strategy in a market where the basis of commercial, legal and cultural authority has changed. This not only affects the production of cultural work, witnessing the increase, for example, of titles and characters designed to be licensed across other products, but also shapes rights ownership in other areas, such as the legal protections given to star image” (2008, 11).

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[3] "The potential of franchises to multiply content production across media begs us to reconsider Jenkins's notion of transmedia storytelling. Are transmedia storytelling and franchise forms synonymous? Ultimately, I argue that they are not. In Jenkins's view, transmedia storytelling provides a consistent, coordinated story world in which the consumer pieces together narratives from pieces strewn across a range of media. The story is not complete without transmedia consumption, and the proliferation of content across media is therefore carefully coordinated by producers who understand each medium and endeavor to ensure unity. Media franchises can be distinguished from this particular phenomenon for three reasons. First, there is no necessary creative coordination or singular narrative structure that unites all iterations produced by a franchise system. Second, and more pressingly, media franchises need not take narrative form. Transmedia storytelling, therefore, is certainly part of franchising, but franchising is not comprehensible as either solely narrative or transmedia phenomenon. Third, media franchises act in two discreet ways either inter-medially or intra-medially thus including the factor of transmedia but not solely characterized by it. Furthermore, the nature of the franchise is not that of a puzzle but of a shared network system that unites and even differentiates content in its ultimate goal to multiply it within a medium or across media not necessarily requesting of audiences to experience each and every mode to make sense of a narrative text mainly because media franchises also seek to explore ancillary markets such as clothes and merchandising (e.g. toys) that are not of an immediate narrative context" (Johnson 2009, 59–60).

By implementing brand theory in order to establish characters as brands this article will begin by extracting the components of the brand from the narrative and medium/a so as to offer an alternate way of considering and examining current adaptations, which are more prone to the tactic of trans-media storytelling acting within a strongly emerging Media Franchise Culture. In order to achieve this, David A. Aacker's theories of brand Core/Extended Identity and Brand Equity theory will be employed in juxtaposition with superhero brands and three inter-industrial media manifestations, that of film, comic book, and video game so as to display that if the superhero character is treated as a brand, then fidelity is no longer the dominant issue. Instead of being hindered by the narrative, or media specificities, adaptation theory can now enter into a constructive dialogue with narrative media while the underlying connecting factor, the respective brand of enquiry, allows one to examine elements such as what is transferred, how it is transferred and represented, by whom, and what meaning, or interpretation, can be appointed due to noticeable similarities and differences. It seems that the "which is better" debate is centred on the aspects of the Extended Identity which, as this article will argue, should not be the basis on which to make fidelity comparisons. What is more, fidelity is not dismissed as a notion but is seen in a new light as a matter of loyalty and value.

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[4] Cf. "At the core of the contemporary phenomenon of media branding lies the abstraction of content from the constraints of any specific analogue media format. Content has come to be conceptualized in a disembodied, almost Platonic, form: any media brand which successfully gains consumer loyalty can be translated across formats to create a raft of interrelated products, which then work in aggregate to drive further consumer awareness of the media brand" (Grainge 2008, 65–66).

[5] Johnson (2009) advocates that while Hollywood is still of a Conglomerate nature, that the aspect of synergy is being replaced by a franchise media culture, one that is prone to content networks that act as contested grounds for negotiation, conflict but also creativity and production of products at an intra-industrial and inter-industrial level across multiple media. According to Johnson where synergy was apt at a vertical employment of content brands media franchise culture employs content brands vertically via licensing and trademarks subjected to the notions of difference intra-industrially and deference inter-industrially. Ultimately, the character brands or worlds act as a shared product, via which licensor and licensee engage in a contested yet productive dialogue so as to achieve the multiple products either within or across media.

Brand Identity: Core and Extended

For a brand to be strong and endure an identity needs to be forged. In the case of character-driven narratives, that identity is found to be residing predominantly within the character that can act and be perceived as a brand. This, however, does not exclude instances where the identity is forged via the cases of world-building. *The Lord of the Rings* (Peter Jackson 2001, 2002, 2003) trilogy is a case in point where the characters but, more importantly, the world in which they reside is the brand. One of the main reasons Marvel superheroes can be seen as brands, without considering their world to be of the core identity, is due to the fact that they essentially live and act in our world, or rather a replicated version of it, in other words, a possible world.[6] The Brand Identity consists of a Core and an Extended Identity. "The core identity represents the timeless essence of the brand. The core identity, which is central to both the meaning and success of the brand, contains the associations that are most likely to remain constant as the brand travels to new markets and products" (Aacker 1996, 85–86). In the case of superheroes this cannot be the narrative, because due to adaptation and trans-media storytelling that component is constantly changing and is actually a suggestive interpretation and manifestation of more abstract concepts. Moreover, the narrative does not account for the cases of merchandise which are external components to the interior narrative chronotope. Nor can it be the medium, or media manifestations, for they are also in constant flux. The salient component, however, in all the aforementioned cases is the superhero, which can be extracted and seen on its own. When considering superheroes alongside their narratives and media manifestations, what can be extracted as belonging to the Core Identity are the notions of good versus evil and the doppelganger, or metaphorical extensions of Manichean dichotomies, exemplified via the Extended Identity. In the cases of narrative, whether that is conceived via comic books, graphic novels, animated series, television series, films, or games, these aspects are always present alongside the notion of the super-prefix in connection to the notion of hero. Thor's superiority is a given due to his divine nature, Batman's is displayed via his money and physical condition, Iron Man's is seen through his intelligence and advanced technology, the Hulk's is established through his anger and strength after the gamma ray exposure, Spiderman's is achieved biologically after the bite of the radioactive spider and Wolverine's is the result of a biologic healing mutation in addition to a governmental experiment. Hence, there has to be a sense of superiority which is conceived in various ways via the Extended Identity. Secondly, the fight between good and evil is vital for the existence of any super/hero. What is intriguing at this point is that depending on the villain, who also foils and complements the superhero as an alter ego, certain Manichean dichotomies are also forged in addition to the doppelganger notion. Every superhero exemplifies duality, either openly like Iron Man, or secretly like Batman and Spiderman. By extension, each villain the superhero encounters expands the double notion to include multiple dichotomies which are also ambiguous in nature. Of course the types of dichotomies evident each time in a narrative are a result of the Extended Identity. Hence, the Extended Identity allows one to concretise, interpret and manifest abstract, yet stable, Core Identity elements.

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[6] Brian McHale discusses the notion of possible worlds in *Postmodernist Fiction* (1996) and how they are not constructed from scratch but are influenced by and resemble our world to varying degrees.

A brand identity requires an Extended Identity in order to manifest and communicate the Core. "The extended brand identity includes elements that provide texture[7] and completeness. It fills in the picture, adding details that help portray what the brand stands for" (Aacker 1996, 87–88). The Core evidently needs to be represented, promoted, communicated and this is achieved by various elements. One factor through which this is achieved is the narrative, while another factor that provides texture and completeness to the superhero brand is the medium of manifestation. Depending on the narrative a superhero brand's story may be told in the way of a serial narrative as found in comic books, or a more holistic narrative as found in film. Moreover, the characteristics and idiosyncrasies of each medium offer differentiation to the superhero brands representation. In comic books and graphic novels the superhero brands are illustrations, in animated series they are animations, and in film they may range from flesh and blood human actors to CGI. Other elements that are affected via narrative and media are the chronotope and its representation. For example, thanks to highly realistic computer graphics, the setting found in videogames may be highly reminiscent of the setting in films whereas in comic books we have a more generalized backdrop of illustrations with specific brand indicators of chronotope. The narrator is different in each case ranging and oscillating from first to third person narration, at other times omniscient and at other times limited. The written word is highly evident in comic books, whereas in film one relies more on dialogue, mise-en-scene and editing. In videogames, on the other hand, instructions and charts play a major role in moving the action along and informing the player of the game play. When considering merchandise such as action figures, one sees that the action figure is a replica of the superhero brand in appearance and is usually not accompanied by chronotope aspects but occasionally by other elements such as props, whether they are automobile replicas, or aspects of the superhero outfit. As for clothing and insignia, these usually represent symbols that are associated with the superhero brand and raise awareness as to the respective superhero character. What is more, the Extended Identity can be treated in such a way so as to reach wider audiences, or satisfy niche audiences. Comic books are usually targeted at younger ages and hardcore fans, blockbuster films address the masses, animated series are usually reserved for children and certain merchandise is for people of all ages as well as for those who simply want the product, or are keen on collecting said items. One can see a variety of representation and manifestation in the Extended Identity and aspects of this identity do not and are not necessarily part of the Core Identity but are rather negotiable aspects, capable of reformation and change. Having distinguished the two components of the Brand Identity, the following section will demonstrate how the Core of superhero brands is extracted from the plethora of narrative media.

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[7] According to Johnson the theory of textures is what *Battlestar Galactica* (2003 mini-series) world-builder Ronald D. Moore stated as employing when re-creating the show (2009, 193–95).

Superhero Brand Core Identity: the Super, the Battle, and the Doppelgänger

Extracting the Core elements of the superhero brand may be deemed difficult in light of all the narrative media that have accumulated and ultimately play a role in how one perceives any superhero. Nonetheless, this is not an impossible feat whether a plethora of media narratives are available or not; on the contrary, perhaps having more adaptations makes this process easier due to the multiple examples for comparison and juxtaposition. Upon having established who or what the brand is, even in the case of Intellectual Properties,[8] one must make the comparison and juxtapose examples so as to unveil the salient Core elements of said brand. In the case of superheroes, the Core elements seen in all mainstream

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[8] Cf. Grainge: “commodified texts remain discursive properties and are subject to ‘multiple social authorings.’ If intellectual property has a cultural life, the meaning of a brand is not simply determined by those who circulate and co-ordinate mass media representations, but is also forged in cultural instances where texts, symbols and images are used by social agents, interpreted by audiences and taken up by fan groups in potentially unforeseen ways” (2008,12).

American superheroes in any media manifestation and throughout any narrative are their superiority, the battle between good and evil, and the notion of the doppelganger. In effect, when adapting any superhero brand narrative to, and across, any capable of story-telling medium those three Core elements are vital and necessary if one wants to see, and accept the brand as that of a superhero. Seeing that the Core Identity of brands in general is abstract, its interpretation and manifestation are essentially based on ideologies pertaining to the culture, broadly speaking, and to the company or industry, specifically speaking, that produces any brand. As a result, these Core elements are malleable, which results in similar, albeit different adaptations. Hence, the Core of a brand is the stable agent that grants continuity, while the Extended Identity is negotiable, malleable and may not exhibit aspects that will ever become a part of the Core Identity, an element that also deems an adaptation as a work in its own right. Similarly, adaptation theory has been advocating that an adaptation need be faithful to the original to some degree, otherwise the new product is something completely different and in no way an adaptation of the original work. Debates regarding fidelity issues have strived to produce theories that pinpoint the essence of the original which ought to be respected and essentially adapted but such a venture can easily fall into the category of copying instead of adapting. Adaptation as a general process requires changes in order for any entity to adapt to a new context/environment. Thus, while fidelity issues are justified in seeking to find the factor that remains constant so as not to lead to the production of a completely new product, it has made the mistake of attempting to locate that stable agent within areas that are, and need to be, malleable so that the stable agent can be perpetuated across time and various boundaries. Evidently, the stable agent cannot be either the narrative or the medium for these are elements that change when adaptation occurs due to factors such as the Industry, creators' interpretation of the Intellectual Property, matters pertaining to economics as well as advances in technology. Instead, what brand theory offers as the stable agent is the Core Identity. For adaptation to occur in the case of superhero brands what needs to remain stable is the superhero brand character with all the attributes and rules that follow it. This then will come into a dialogue and negotiation with narrative media factors so as to determine how the Extended Identity will be treated and formulated. This process is also applicable to the cases of Intellectual Properties where the brand is not a character but a complete world such as *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, the *Harry Potter* world (Chris Columbus, David Yates, Mike Newell, Alfonso Cuaron, 2001–2011), *The Matrix*, *Lost* (J. J. Abrams, Jeffrey

Lieber, Damon Lindelof, 2004–2010), the *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* universe and numerous others. Here the world, its context and rules as well as the characters need to be examined via Core and Extended Identity theory which will no doubt offer an intriguing study and examination.

The common core elements make all superheroes similar in that these elements are shared by all superhero brands. This immediately points to the notion of originality which does not uphold when, in spite of the examples juxtaposed, all are considered super/heroes. This also ensures loyalty to the brand because these elements are present within all superhero narrative media to varying degrees. What distinguishes superhero brands from one another as brands, as narratives and as products of one medium and/or multiple media is the malleability and treatment of these abstract elements in the area of the Extended Identity of the brand where these elements are essentially grounded, tackled, negotiated, manifested, and given texture(s). The manifestation of the super-prefix for each superhero brand grants different powers/abilities to each superhero. Their origins are also established via the super-prefix because reason needs to be given as to how these powers were accumulated, or granted, which also leads to the donning of a hidden, or open, secret identity. Continuing this train of thought, the origin account becomes a story which positions the superhero brand in a particular world/context of a specific nature with specific rules, engaging with other characters that hinder, or move, the story along, and also establishes the villains the superhero comes across, thus manifesting the battle of good versus evil. The Manichean dichotomies are also established based on the super-prefix, the origin story given to explain and rationalize it, as well as how these powers are put to use and against whom. The medium also contributes to these malleable elements by offering ways of representation for the superhero brand, his/her world and the analogous villains.

Depending on the medium other factors are added to the Extended Identity, such as comic book formats, blockbuster formats, or gaming formats, which add to the experience of any superhero brand, offering similar, or different, experiences such as story, or game play. What is more, the medium and the assigned formats negotiate and perhaps dictate how elements such as the battle between good and evil, or various Manichean dichotomies, are to be established and represented. For example, in the blockbuster format spectacle has been, and still is, an option that is preferred and has even been employed by the gaming formats for interactive experience for game players. Comic book formats, on the other hand, rely on the treatment of the gutter in juxtaposition to the treatment of time and space within the panels, thus leading to alternate chronotopes that need to be considered in each medium and in juxtaposition with the analogous narrative. What can be deduced at this point is that no matter what the treatment of the malleable Extended Identity has to offer the Core Identity, what is certain is that not all the aforementioned cases of Extended Identity are adopted by, or have become strictly core identity factors. Joel Schumacher's Batman films (1995, 1997) are a good example and indication of the creator's interpretation and choices and of how these two adaptations and their Extended Identity manifestations may not strictly belong to the Core but pose more as a possibility of that Core. Extended Identities essentially offer multiple outlets for the abstract Core Identity to be realized. As far as adaptation theory is concerned, what has to be transferred from the initial work to any adaptation is the Core of the brand. A superhero is not a superhero unless a super-prefix exists in combination with a good versus evil battle and Manichean dichotomies of one form or another are present. How the Extended Identity is treated and, more importantly, to what degree it manifests the abstract elements of the Core Identity is what should concern adaptation theory. Any additional Extended Identity factors that simply act as details, or textures such as the aesthetics of the setting, the theme music, the outfits and props, the story conceived each time, the camera angles, editing and mise-en-scene, the narrator, or even the spectacle should not dictate if an adaptation is faithful. Essentially it becomes clear that it is not a matter of being faithful to the original, for even the original was influenced, or inspired, by something prior, hence the notion of intertextuality, but it is a matter of being loyal to the Core abstract elements that grant the existence of the superhero brand character in particular, and of any brand – whether product or world – in general. This train of thought ultimately sees all adaptations as works in their own right but as adaptations faithful to not necessarily each other but to the abstract concepts from whence they originated. After examining how the Core Identity has been realized for each superhero brand, these factors will help in determining the extent to which this realization was received, thus the Equity, or Value appointed to each brand. Hence, fidelity issues either pertaining to adaptation theory, or regarding the treatment of brands in general, ought to be re-assessed as a process whereby one examines what was done, how and what is its value and meaning in juxtaposition with the initial work as well as fellow works so as to determine what is considered more successful and of more value when dealing with a range of superhero brands.

Brand Equity and the Core Identity

A brand not only needs to have a consistent Core Identity but as a whole it needs to have value, a matter that is examined from the scope of Brand Equity. According to Aacker, "brand equity is a set of assets (liabilities) linked to a brand's name and symbol that adds to (or subtracts from) the value provided by a product or service to a firm and/or that firm's customers. The major asset categories are: Brand name awareness, Brand loyalty, Perceived quality and Brand associations" (1996, 7–8). The asset of awareness is one that "refers to the strength of a brand's presence in the consumer's mind" (1996, 10). In the case of American mainstream superheroes existing since the 1930s, awareness, if not immediate recognition, is almost a given for the majority of the superhero character brands. If the audience is not aware of all of them, then at least the most renowned can be named such as Superman, Batman, and Spiderman. Awareness is measured according to the different ways consumers remember a brand "ranging from recognition, to recall, to 'top of mind,' to dominant" (1996, 10). Recognition is gained from past exposure not necessarily involving where the brand was encountered, why it is different, or even to which product class it belongs. Simply recognizing a brand, according to psychology, can produce positive feelings towards it (1996, 10). Recognition is made easier when a brand is associated with a symbol or logo, like the S of Superman, or the golden arches of McDonalds. This is the case of blockbusters in the area of film. Since their marketing campaigns target the widest possible audience, it is difficult to avoid seeing some advertisement of some kind before the film hits the theatres. As Aacker points out, "when consumers see a brand and remember that they have seen it before, they realize that the company is spending money to support the brand" (1996, 10). Brand recall, on the other hand, is said to happen when a product class is mentioned and the name of a brand pops into consumer's minds as an example, or means of reference, for the product class. For example, if the product class heroes, or superheroes, comes up then it is no surprise if Superman or Batman are recalled, thus standing as examples for that particular product class. Brand name dominance is the extreme part of the scale where consumers can only think of the name of a particular brand as standing for the entire product class, as has happened for brand names such as Zerox, Kleenex, and Kellogg's. The asset of perceived quality is one that essentially interests the Hollywood Entertainment Industry as far as Box Office revenues and ancillary markets are concerned and of course the consumers and whether they are getting their money's worth by purchasing said brand products. In order to reach any conclusions regarding this factor then statistical analyses are necessary both from the side of the industry as well as from the side of the consumers. Loyalty, a third asset, in the area of branding is mainly concerned with the loyalty of the consumers with the brand product. Thus, for the cases of Intellectual Properties, and their adaptations, the matter is left up to the actual consumers. If they are pleased with said brand adaptation, whether it is extremely faithful, or simply influenced by the initial work, they will display their degree of loyalty. Of course, this cannot act as the sole force for considering whether an adaptation is considered faithful, as adaptation theory has been advocating mainly due the fact that the majority of the audience is unaware of the procedures necessary for the production of a comic book, film, or video game and more importantly because audience members are subjective to what they read, see or play as are creators in their interpretations. Depending on their preferences, they may feel that an adaptation has been satisfactory such as Sam Raimi's *Spiderman* trilogy (2002, 2004, and 2007) and not feel discontent that various details such as the absence of character Gwen Stacey, or the contraption created by Peter Parker to control his web-wrist output has not been acknowledged, or employed, in the films. Others, however, may feel utter disappointment that these details were not included. Thus, when it comes to adaptations, fidelity and loyalty are also matters that concern the audience and apparently the end product can never fully satisfy everyone.

Consumers have, therefore, been divided into loyalty segments ranging from the "noncustomers (those who buy competitor brands or are not product class users), to the price switchers (those who are price sensitive), to the passively loyal (those who buy out of habit rather than reason), to the fence sitters (those who are indifferent between two or more brands) and finally to the committed" (Aacker 1996, 22). The notions of loyalty and fidelity not only for brands in general but also for adaptations, as this article is seeking to display, are matters that concern the industry and the audience. Essentially, the analysis and examination of adaptations results in comparisons between original and adaptations as well as the degrees of faithfulness. Perhaps it is more constructive and conclusive to examine what has remained similar and what has changed so as to decipher the implications of these changes, no matter how minute and, moreover, establish that especially when adapting a brand across media, it will automatically lead to changes and differences. By applying brand identity theory and considering the importance of Brand Equity nonetheless this article points to the Core as the factor that remains constant and stable throughout while the Extended Identity is what is negotiable and can act either as an asset ensuring Equity, or depending on the treatment and end-product even a liability, thus also taking into consideration the superhero brand adaptations that were not well received and did not do well at the Box Office. The final asset, that of brand associations, is driven by the identity of the brand and what it stands for in consumers' mind. For example, the brand of heroes has the range of including superheroes and when mentioned could cause a consumer to bring to mind a specific, or multiple superheroes. Moreover, the colours blue, red, and yellow as well as the capital S bring to mind the Superman brand, or the letter X can be associated with the X-Men brand. The notion of intertextuality fits very well with this brand equity asset especially if the brands under consideration are Intellectual Properties. This also means that aspects such as the aforementioned of the brand need not be the only elements capable of driving associations. For example, Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886) could easily drive one to make associations with the Hulk character or vice versa. Having thus seen the components of Brand Equity, it becomes obvious how vital, and necessary, Equity is for the endurance of any brand. What is more, by substituting loyalty and value for fidelity, the latter immediately comes under re-assessment in regards adaptations, the Industry as well as consumer audiences.

Conclusion

The aim of this article was to propose a theoretical concept for examining adaptations that is based on the actual practices of Media Franchise culture where Intellectual Properties are treated as character or world brands. The core identity of a Brand enables one to determine the stable, continuous abstract agent that drives any particular character, or world brand. By extension, narrative and medium/a further assist by displaying how the Core is manifested in the extended identity. This in turn, allows adaptation theory to re-assess its holdings on fidelity issues because it becomes evident that the Extended Identity is the aspect that is negotiable and in need of change for adaptations to occur. Thus by holding the Core as the stable agent and seeing its treatment across narrative(s) and medium/a it becomes clear that fidelity is not a notion that should consider how faithful the adaptation was to the original but the degree of loyalty of the product towards the Core and what that entails. Juxtaposing the Extended Identity with the Core as well as including factors that pertain to Brand Equity further allow one to conceive of the vast network of choices that essentially lead to a dialogue regarding the what and how of any brand treatment which ultimately results in stability via change but also leaves room for negotiating the meanings offered by Extended Identity and how that affects the understanding of the Core. Whether a superhero brand is conceived in a comic book, film or game s/he is still a superhero, whether Spiderman sports a contraption for his web-wrist output or not he is still Spiderman, whether Tim Burton or Christopher Nolan direct the Batman film, it is still a Batman film. Hence, the collaboration of Adaptation theory and Brand Identity theory can lead to a re-assessment of fallacies and issues which can lead to, in the words of Alan Moore, the following conclusion, "everything is exactly the same, except for the fact that it's all totally different" (Will Brooker 2012, 42).

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