



Arts, Concepts and Technologies in Visual Culture

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Claudia Lambach (Editor)

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This e-book *Arts, Concepts and Technologies* intends to publish texts written by authors about the three themes of the title from seven countries: Brazil, Germany, India, Italy, Portugal, Spain and Uruguay. The main idea is to expose ways to understand the themes by authors who develop their insightful ideas in two idioms: English and Spanish. All authors are VIC —Visual Culture— Members and VIC is one of the IAMCR —International Association for Media and Communication Research— Working Groups.

VIC deals with visuality in Arts, Cinema & Audiovisual, Photography and New Technologies as VR, AR and IA, focusing on artistic and cultural studies from a critical viewpoint. The texts in this e-book portray the evolution of visual aspects and digital media emphasizing history and memory and the many changes produced by new technologies that are creating new ways to understand and describe contemporaneity within digital frames. Here is VIC's link: <https://iamcr.org/s-wg/working-group/vic>

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com has successfully playing constructive role in spreading positive communication for the last six years. Prof. Pandey was Director, of UP's first Educational Multimedia Centre, established in Ambedkar University, Lucknow. Currently, Dr. Pandey is working as Professor in the Deptt. of Mass Communication and journalism, Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar Central University, Lucknow.

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Paulo Filipe Monteiro. Full professor at Universidade Nova de Lisboa, where he founded the MA and PhD programs on the Performing Arts. Paulo Filipe Monteiro wrote and directed

four prize-winning fiction films: *Amor Cego/Three to Tango*, 2010, 25'; *Zeus*, 2017, 117'; *Pas de Quoi*, 2020; *Noites Claras*, 110', 2025, now being shown in festivals. As a screenwriter, he wrote for other directors seven feature films, selected to Cannes, Locarno, Venice, São Paulo, etc. And the TV series *A Viúva do Enforcado*, 10 episodes. He also directed 16 theatre plays. He has been an actor in 11 feature films and in 50 series and tv films of several nationalities.

Susan Keith, Ph.D., is a professor in the Department of Journalism and Media Studies at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, New Jersey, in the United States and associate dean for programs in Rutgers' School of Communication and Information. Her journalism studies research focuses on visual journalism, media ethics and law, professional transitions, and media pedagogy. She is the co-editor of *Teaching Journalism Online* (UNESCO, 2023) and the editor of *Teaching Communication Vol. III: Teaching Journalism and Media* (Cognella, forthcoming 2025). A former journalist, Keith earned a Ph.D. from the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill. In 2021–2022, she served as president of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJMC), the oldest U.S.-based communication association.

Thomas Wiedemann is a senior researcher and lecturer at the Institute for Media Research at Chemnitz University of Technology, Germany. He received his PhD (2012) and habilitation degree (2024) from Ludwig-Maximilians University in Munich. His research interests include media production culture, media reality, discourse analysis, film studies, social theories, and qualitative methods.

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Preface

Denize Araujo

The e-book *Arts, Concepts & Technologies in Visual Culture* is a publication from VIC — Visual Culture Working Group— which will be launched on July 16, as part of VIC’s activities for the IAMCR International Conference 2025, in Singapore, hosted by Nanyang Technological University. The authors of this CIAC e-book are from eight countries, Brazil, Germany, India, Italy, Portugal, Spain, United States and Uruguay, and present their viewpoints about the themes of Arts, Concepts and Technologies in Visual Culture in one of the three official idioms of IAMCR, English, French and Spanish, and are presented here in alphabetical order of their names.

Ana Sedeño-Valdellos, PhD in Audiovisual Communication & Professor of the Department of Audiovisual Communication & Advertising at the University of Malaga, Spain, and **Manuel Emilio Mari-Altozano**, is a PhD candidate in Communication at the University of Malaga. Graduate in Musical Composition and Clarinet Performance, specializing in creation for the performing arts through a Master’s Degree in Audiovisual Creation and Performing Arts, he is currently conducting in-depth research in the field of musical compo-

sition for Virtual Reality. His Body Synthesis projects and his contribution to adapting music education for deaf people are also noteworthy.

Denize Araujo, PhD in Comparative Literature, Cinema & Arts at UCR – University of California, Riverside, Post-Doctor from University of Algarve (Portugal), and Research Professor at UTP – Univ. Tuiuti do Paraná, in her text, “*Interventioned Images*”: *memory and spectatoriality*, coins a new concept, “repertorial-spectator”, emphasizing that some images demand spectators with knowledge and repertoire in order to understand intertextualities from other artistic scenarios, montages that include implicit references not well known by simple spectators, and also technological interventions as AI in films.

Eduardo Zilles Borba, Doctor in Information and Communication Sciences from University Fernando Pessoa, Portugal and Post-Doctor in Electronic Engineer and Digital Systems, is Professor of UFRGS – Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul, in Brazil. His text, *Brand Communication in Virtual Reality: the consumer perspective through user testing experiences*, presents an immersive user test protocol in VR to study the consumer perception on the brand communication.

Fernando Andacht, PhD in Philosophy at University of Bergen, Norway, Member of the Postdoctoral Studies at University of Ottawa, Canada, and Professor of Theory of Communication at University of the Republic, Montevideo and Universidade Tuiuti do Paraná, Brazil. His text, *Análisis del marco de una serie web o cómo convertir lo banal en sublime*, presents the notion of frame from Gregory Bateson (1972),

adopted by Erwing Goffmann (1976), in a case study of Agustín Ferrando, audiovisual artist, who manages to transform a collage of videos into a fascinated work of art.

Govind Ji Pandey is Filmmaker, Doctor in Journalism and Mass Communication at MG KashiVidya Peeth, Varanasi, India, Dean of School of Media & Communication and Professor at Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar Central University, Lucknow, India. His text, *Fake versus Real Human: Digital Human Characters in films and its sociological implications* analyzes four films, *Her* (2013), *Subservience* (2024), *Elysium* (2013) and *Blade Runner 2049* (2017), with AI generated characters and develops a survey to verify the acceptance of the actions of Human versus AI characters.

Michele Varini, PhD student in Sociology at Univ Cattolica del Sacro Cuore in Milan, Italy, explores intersections of fashion, gender, & identity in digital environments in his work *The unseen blade is the deadliest: Exploring the Intersection of Fashion, Gender, and Identity in Digital Worlds – The Case Study of League of Legends*, examining how digital technologies transform the relationships between fashion, gaming, and media, revealing hybrid dynamics where boundaries between material and immaterial, online and offline, are increasingly fluid and constantly shifting.

Paulo Filipe Monteiro is full professor at Universidade Nova de Lisboa, where he created MA and PhD programs in the performing arts. He is also film screenwriter, director and actor. His text, *Intermedial strategies of montage in cinema, dance and theatrical dance*, deals with the special case of Pina Bausch, considering her montages and assemblage of materials organized

in a cinematographic and musical way. He will describe Eugène Dupréel's theory of consolidation as a tool for the development of his research.

Susan Keith is PhD in Journalism & Mass Communication from Univ. of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, and Associate Dean for Programs & Professor of Journalism and Media Studies at Rutgers – New Brunswick School of Communication and Information. In her text, *Collective memory in a luminal form: Commemoration of Queen Elizabeth on UK front pages*, she analyzes images of UK newspaper front pages published the day after the Queen's death and argues that in a largely digital era, front pages can act as a space for collective memory, evoking emotion rather than sharing information.

Thomas Wiedemann, PhD from LMU – Munich, Communication Scholar & Senior Researcher, and Lecturer at the Institute for Media Research at Chemnitz University of Technology, in Germany, in his text, *Little Room for disruption and experimentation: Dominant patterns in the design of state-funded German feature films*, analyzes 40 commercially or artistically successful feature films between 2012–2020, concluding that, almost without exception, there hasn't been many innovative modes of expression and aesthetics in the audiovisual style.

The title of this e-book, *Arts, Concepts and Technologies in Visual Culture*, is suggestive and promoted a series of themes related to visibility, emphasizing new and old ways for arts and films montages, building a chain of intertextual technologies among the texts and an invitation for readers interested in new concepts, in Art, Films, Fashion, Dance and Journalism. Enjoy it! Many thanks to CIAC Editions!

Mundos virtuales y música: casos de estudio de conciertos en el Metaverso

Ana Sedeño-Valdellos and Manuel Emilio Marí-Altozano

Resumen. La industria musical es uno de los ámbitos donde antes se prueban los usos tecnológicos incipientes desde la composición, la promoción con videoclips a la música en directo. Al igual que en los presenciales, el usuario busca identificarse con el resto de asistentes, desarrollar su identidad y un disfrute hedonista de su música favorita. El metaverso en proyectos musicales ha crecido después de la pandemia, en la medida en que se ha desarrollado como manera de afrontar el aislamiento de la asistencia a los conciertos virtuales. El trabajo analiza el metaverso como mundos virtual para proyectos musicales donde se analizan los ejemplos de casos de Ariana Grande y Travis Scott en Fortnite, los conciertos de Suzanne Vega en Second Life, el de BTS en Minecraft y el de Lil Nas X Concert Experience en Roblox.

Las conclusiones apuntan a que el metaverso se ha utilizado en niveles algo bajos en los que se refiere a la interacción, priorizando la construcción de una visualidad cercana al concierto especialmente al principio de la experiencia, para transformarse a una experiencia más personalizada bajo cierta adaptabilidad y variabilidad, según la estrategia promocional musical. Además, se encuentran unidas al entorno y el videojuego que les sirve de soporte y a su experiencia visual.

Palabras clave: cambio climático · cine de ficción climática · ecodramaturgias

Abstract. The music industry is one of the areas where incipient technological uses are tested first, from composition, video clip promotion to live music. As in live music, the user seeks to identify with the rest of the attendees, to develop his identity and a hedonistic enjoyment of his favorite music. The metaverse in music projects has grown after the pandemic, as it has developed as a way to cope with the isolation of attending virtual concerts. The paper analyzes metaverse as virtual worlds for music projects where the case examples of Ariana Grande and Travis Scott in Fortnite, Suzanne Vega's concerts in Second Life, BTS's concert in Minecraft and Lil Nas X Concert Experience in Roblox are analyzed.

The findings point to the fact that the metaverse has been used at somewhat low levels where interaction is concerned, prioritizing the construction of a visuality close to the concert especially at the beginning of the experience, to transform to a more personalized experience under some adaptability and variability, depending on the musical promotional strategy. In addition, they are linked to the environment and the video game that supports them and their visual experience.

Keywords: climate change · cinema clifi · ecodramaturghy

1. Inmersión, música popular y eventos virtuales

Las transformaciones en el campo del espectador de productos culturales han sido abordados por los estudios de recepción como nuevas formas y circunstancias de la experiencia gracias a la digitalización (Staiger, 2000), y el transmedia. Los diversos formatos multiplataforma o el cine de metaverso se suman en los últimos años a la realidad aumentada, la realidad virtual y la visión 360° para componer componen un panorama general novedoso de la representación visual y la espectacularidad.

La inmersión supone una importante herramienta de relación espectacular pues mezcla la experiencia real y la virtual hasta el punto de que el espectador pierde la noción de conciencia del entorno físico. Tiene una serie de ventajas, como hacer confluír dentro de la experiencia (Ochoa Lozano, 2023), así como permitir el diseño personalizado del espacio virtual que puede interesar o ser implementado para públicos diversos (Blascovich *et al.*, 2009; Loureiro *et al.*, 2019; Loveridge, 2020). Además, como apunta Mystakidis (2022) ayuda a superar las desventajas de las plataformas 2D, aunque tiene limitaciones como la no presencia, la baja percepción, la inactividad y la crudeza emocional.

El concepto de presencia, o estar presente, es un factor frecuentemente enfatizado en entornos inmersivos mediados. [...] los resultados muestran que un mayor seguimiento del usuario, el uso de visuales estereoscópicos y campos de visión más amplios en las pantallas visuales tienen un impacto significativamente mayor que las mejoras en la mayoría de las demás características de los sistemas inmersivos, incluyendo la calidad del contenido visual y

auditivo. Estos hallazgos se discuten a la luz de las teorías sobre el constructo de presencia, así como de sus implicaciones prácticas para el diseño. (Cummings y Bailenson, 2016)

Por otro lado, la inmersión se encuentra caracterizada por la introducción del espectador en un estado de flow, por la inserción en un espacio y un tiempo especiales, donde el componente lúdico, el reto planteado y la sensación de progreso e interacción se producen en tiempo real (Li & Huang, 2023; Yin & Jin, 2022). El espacio virtual es un componente relevante para la consecución de altos niveles de inmersión. Sherman y Craig (2019) hablan de diversos tipos como los mundos simulados, en 3D, de entretenimiento y de realidad virtual.

La música popular ha protagonizado algunos de los desarrollos más acelerados e inspiradores de la era de la postproducción, tanto en la composición musical como en la generación de material audiovisual. Su industria supone uno de los primeros indicadores de transformación en torno a innovaciones tecnológicas y sociales y donde primero se experimentan. Ya fue así con la digitalización, en un primer momento con consecuencias negativas como la piratería, aunque en un segundo momento con los avances en producción, que democratizaron la composición y expresión musical. Esta activación de conjuntos completos de personas para la creación solo resulta una de las transformaciones que se han producido y que afectan a la industria.

El desarrollo de plataformas de acceso a la escucha musical via web, los sistemas de recomendación musical y la composición a través de la música generativa y la música y visuales hechas con código (Apolo Valdivia, 2023; Hunter-Tilney, 2023), han permitido que cualquier persona cree música con medios accesibles y más baratos.

No hay duda de que las nuevas tecnologías digitales han transformado la forma en que se produce y consume la música, aunque ha sido después de la pandemia por Covid-19 cuando se han consolidado unas formas específicas de producción y recepción que incluyen el paso por la tecnología y las redes sociales (Pérez, 2023). Además, la música se inserta en mundos de ensueño, fantásticos e inaccesibles en condiciones normales, o ser espejos de espacios reales (Gértrudix y Gértrudix, 2012).

Los eventos en vivo sufrieron especialmente durante el período de confinamiento en casa. Los conciertos de música pop, especialmente, disminuyeron por el confinamiento y las redes sociales aumentaron su uso como plataformas donde desarrollar estrategias de marketing, huyendo de la saturación de la música en directo (van der Hoeven, A., Everts, R., Mulder, M., Berkers, P., Hitters, E. y Rutten, 2022). Las ventas de entradas a conciertos bajaron y para dar salida a la necesidad de espacios de encuentro y unión entre los artistas y el público, la industria musical se adaptó rápidamente a través del *livestreaming*, una potente herramienta promocional o de marketing y compra (Zhang, Fang, Wang y Luo, 2020; Wongkitrungrueng, Dehouche y Assarut, 2020).

La transmisión de conciertos es el medio más básico de utilizar Internet para llegar a los fans. Dichos conciertos pueden ser en vivo o pregrabados. Los conciertos en vivo ofrecen una experiencia inmediata y más caché social que ver conciertos pregrabados. Tanto Facebook como YouTube, que ya tienen millones de usuarios y funciones de redes sociales integradas, se han utilizado para transmitir conciertos. Si bien los artistas han estado regalando

su trabajo libremente, durante la pandemia, la monetización es una parte inevitable de la industria. (Breese, Fox y Vaidyanathan, 2020, p. 182)

Las transmisiones en vivo desde casa de artistas conocidos comenzaron pronto. El 16 de marzo de 2020 Chris Martin de Coldplay realizó el primer concierto a través de Instagram, y al día siguiente John Legend se sumó a esta tendencia: era el proyecto *One World, Together at home*, el mayor evento de la era Covid-19, que tenía la finalidad de recaudar fondos para la Organización Mundial de la Salud y el Fondo de Respuesta Solidaria actuaron ochenta artistas y se retransmitieron ocho horas de conciertos.

2. Los conciertos en el metaverso: industria musical y tecnología

En un paso más, el metaverso compone mediante inmersión todo un mundo virtual, en muchas ocasiones temático. La palabra metaverso se escuchó por primera vez en la novela de ciencia ficción *Snow Crash* de Neal Stephenson en 1992, donde dos avatares virtuales interactuaban y tenían experiencias de similar calidad a las reales.

Un metaverso es una red de entorno virtual tridimensional infinita y de gran escala con capacidad ilimitada de usuarios, con base en conexión real. En estos espacios/tiempos los espectadores son invitados a una realidad alternativa a través de avatares, representaciones tridimensionales permanentes, que se encarnan en los espacios virtuales. Esta convergencia

física y virtual por inmersión que permite el metaverso incluye interactividad, corporeidad, y persistencia (Castronova, 2001), a las que se añade el ser la sincronicidad y viveza, así como límite de usuarios, ofrecer interoperabilidad y ser una experiencia que abarca mundo físico y virtual (Ball, 2020). Existen varios tipos de metaverso: los juegos en línea, los mundos espejo, la realidad aumentada y el lifelogging (Cascio, 2020), que dan lugar a diversas experiencias y formatos en la red.

El metaverso es un entorno muy empleado en otros formatos audiovisuales, de los que recogen usos y prácticas en el diseño y customización de estrategias de comunicación con los usuarios. En primer lugar pueden citarse los videojuegos, especialmente los juegos de mundo abierto —Open-World Games—, que se separan de la jugabilidad lineal de otros tipos de juegos como los de rol, permiten una exploración del espacio con mayor libertad, y asumen que los jugadores “hacen lo que quieren cuando quieren” (Hughes & Cairns, 2021, p. 3). Esto aumenta la personalización o al menos la sensación individual de control sobre la experiencia, que la hace mucho más inmersiva.

En cuanto a los conciertos en el metaverso, suponen una evolución de una tradición de colaboración entre la música popular, las tecnologías inmersivas y la industria del videojuego. Precedentes del concierto en metaverso son los Couch tours, donde los fans se reúnen online para ver espectáculos en tiempo real. Nugs.tv fue un canal lanzado en 1993 donde se ofrecían una gran lista de programas, con grupos top de la década de los noventa. Parecen tener bastantes ventajas, como la de una mayor colaboración, aumento de la creatividad y la expresión a través de un mix de iniciativas (Cohen, 2023, p. 47), generar

experiencias interactivas mediante la hibridación con el juego o generar nuevas identidades además de nuevas formas de generar ingresos (Arvidsson, 2022).

Los conciertos en el metaverso tratan de desarrollar una experiencia única y personal. La narrativa tradicional del “gameplay” se sustituye por un escenario en el que el jugador-espectador consume un contenido audiovisual en un entorno gamificado en distintos niveles de autonomía y posibilidades de interactividad. En cierto modo, la exploración y el descubrimiento sobrepasan la linealidad narrativa a la manera de los videojuegos de mundo abierto (Szymanczyk *et al.*, 2011). Esta autonomía se expresa en diferentes grados, definidos por las posibilidades interactivas del espectador.

Poco después de la pandemia, el festival del Metaverso entre el 21 y el 24 de octubre de 2021 tuvo las actuaciones de Deamau, Aluna George y Alison Wonderland, con formato de showcase virtual y videojuego con 64 artistas y la plataforma digital de MusicHood, con entradas a 3 euros. Hubo 7 escenarios y se crearon variados mercados donde había dinero virtual y se podía bailar con otros avatares conectados. “Con la creación de este espacio virtual, quisimos generar una suerte de lanzadera para el descubrimiento de nuevas artistas de todo el mundo. Una oportunidad de demostrar el talento y de que trascienda las fronteras de cada una. Todo en el entorno gamificado de Musichood que intenta emular las mismas interacciones de los asistentes a un festival”. (San Juan, 2021, 29 de septiembre).

En 2022 se produjo un nuevo festival en el Metaverso respaldado por dos de las más destacadas plataformas de realidad aumentada y metaverso: Over the Reality y Decentraland (Bitcoin, 2022). La primera es una plataforma de realidad aumentada (RA)

y la segunda creadora de mundos virtuales donde los asistentes puede comprar con NFTs y la criptomoneda MANA que usa el sistema blockchain Ethereum. Este festival evaluó por primera vez las actuaciones en el metaverso: Blackpink ganó el premio a la mejor interpretación en metaverso con más de 300 millones de votos, superando a BTS, Ariana Grande, Charli XCX, Twenty One Pilots y Justin Bieber. Poco después, los MTV Video Music Awards estrenaron categoría titular Mejor interpretación en el metaverso, que destaca al artista y la plataforma, que obtuvo la banda de K pop Blackpink en PUBG Mobil (Yadlos, 2022).

3. Objetivos y metodología

La presente investigación tiene como propósito la descripción del metaverso como un espacio para el concierto y la interrelación del espectador con los artistas musicales, en un contexto como la industria musical, acostumbrada a experimentar con la tecnología para integrarla en los usos y modelos de escucha y generar nuevas tendencias a la vez que amplía el mercado.

Se trata de analizar el metaverso como un entorno aprovechable para la música en directo y el liveness, que aparece como forma de realidad mixta con influencias de realidad virtual, aumentada y las prácticas digitales. Este estudio explora los casos que se han producido ya y que son ejemplo para el desarrollo de la industria en los últimos años, especialmente después del confinamiento por COVID-19.

El objetivo general del trabajo es identificar ejemplos de conciertos en el metaverso y analizar sus características y posibilidades en el metaverso.

4. Conciertos en metaverso. Estudios de caso

4.1. *Suzanne Vega*

Una siguiente fase en esta evolución e hibridación del concierto hacia su inclusión en el espacio virtual son los conciertos en Second Life. Uno de ellos fue el de Suzanne Vega en 2006¹, que se considera el primer concierto en el metaverso, donde la cantante interpreta en vivo en un estudio, mientras su avatar se conectaba en el videojuego.

Tras un diálogo a modo de entrevista radiofónica con un presentador que exclamaba que era la primera vez que se actuaba en Second Life con una cantante en directo, la artista habla sobre su vida personal y tras ello canta a capella *Tom's Diner*. Mientras un grupo la atiende desde una grada de medio tamaño. Desde el escenario a la grada, la cámara intercambiaba posiciones (Figura 1), incluyendo insertos de los espectadores que veían sorprendidos la actuación, aunque el tono recuerda al entorno radiofónico o televisivo.

En declaraciones a un medio especializado la cantante expresaba las ventajas del metaverso y la capacidad para su interactividad:

Las audiencias reales son más fáciles de leer; tal vez estén cansadas porque han estado trabajando toda la semana o están emocionadas. Los sientes y sientes su energía. No es que la audiencia virtual no tuviera energía: la tenían. Pero es diferente si estás tirado en el suelo

1 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YCLSkTEBj2k>



Figura 1. Concierto de Suzanne Vega en Second Life (2006)

de tu habitación, que si eres un fan que ha estado haciendo cola y ahora estás dentro del teatro. [...] Un concierto virtual tiene más dimensiones que simplemente sintonizar una estación de radio. También el factor interactivo funciona bien. Si ves a un artista en la televisión, no puedes gritarle, pero en este medio el artista puede leer lo que estás escribiendo. (Simmons, 2007)

Esta primera incursión en un concierto estuvo caracterizada por esta falta de inclusión de nuevos mundos o geografías, y un exceso de realidad, que junto a una falta latente de historias y una falta de erótica llevó a los usuarios a una especie de desencantamiento o aburrimiento de Second Life (Moreno Toledano, L. y Rogel Villalba, 2016). Sin embargo, la cantante llegó a tener un espacio permanente en la red social, al igual que otros artistas como Duran Duran.

4.2. Fortnite: Marshmello, Travis Scott y Ariana Grande

El show de Marshmello 2019 en Pleasant Park en Fortnite² atrajo a 10.7 millones de fans. Hay que apuntar que este productor y DJ luce en todas sus performances una máscara de malvavisco o nube —forma de golosina— con unas XX en los ojos. Su identidad se desconoce de manera oficial pero se especula con un conocido dj estadounidense. Este juego sobre la identidad de los autores es tradicional en la música electrónica: otros grupos como Daft Punk ha empleado esta técnica de construcción de autoría o branding de la industria musical, coherente con los valores de la cultura de club y música electrónica y dance (Cabrera y Sedeño-Valdellós, 2023).

El espacio, inserto en una especie de desierto típico del medio oeste norteamericano, era el tradicional de concierto, con un escenario elevado y una parte baja donde se encontraban y bailaban los avatares (Figura 2). Sin cambiar de lugar-escenario, el colorido, adornos y complementos se modifican en hasta en 6 ocasiones.

El concierto, que dirige en todo momento el músico, tiene a su vez una sesión de visuales, lo que produce un efecto de *mise en abime* y pantallización durante su visionado, unido al hecho de que se multiplica su identidad a través de varias figuras gigantes a ambos lados del escenario. Estas se combinan con otros personajes de raíz antropomórfica en el espacio justo posterior a este. Una gran F de Fortnite preside su parte superior. Las luces de neón, los efectos lumínicos y los movi-

2 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NBsCzN-jfvA>



Figura 2. Concierto de Marshmello en Fortnite

mientos de cámara de tipo grúa de acercamiento y alejamiento del escenario en grandes planos generales, hacen el resto. Parece pretenderse mantener el vínculo con la experiencia de la sesión en directo del dj, como evento climax de la vivencia de este tipo de género musical. A esto contribuye el flujo musical entre los diversos temas del músico: *Chasing Colors (feat. Noah Cyrus)*, *Flashbacks*, *Fly (feat. Leah Culver)*, *Alone* (el tema que lo lanzó a la fama) y *Happier*.

Estos elementos permiten comprobar la priorización de un sentido de inmersión similar al de la fiesta rave: como en estos rituales colectivos se construye una especie de “conciencia encarnada” (De Nora, 2000), con un efecto sobre el cuerpo e incitación al movimiento y a entrar en un estado de trance, unido a un componente contestatario y crítico de esta subcultura (Fernández-Calderón, 2019). El músico dirige la sesión en todo momento, tal como es coherente con la cultura de club, en la que el dj actúa como maestro de ceremonias (Graham, 2006).

Los avatars de participantes tienen un especial gusto por el salto y el cambio de lugar en el espacio del escenario, aunque no parece que tengan herramientas para interactuar entre ellos. La interacción se caracterizó, además, por la venta de skins y objetos temáticos como el emote Marsh Walk (Çelik, 2023).

El concierto *Astronomical* de Travis Scott en abril de 2020³ constó de 5 performances, que congregaron a 12.3 millones de jugadores según Epic Games (Shiu, 2022). Al principio del evento un asteroide se estrella, y con la explosión aparece el avatar gigante del artista cantando su conocido tema *Sicko Mode*, cuyo videoclip revolucionó también el panorama de los efectos especiales en el formato. El espacio era menos convencional, con variados escenarios que iban cambiando a través del flujo dirigido por el cantante, con un avatar de gran tamaño (Figura 3). Los jugadores no solo bailaban sino que flotaban y se movían libremente, en algunos momentos Scott interactuaba con ellos.

Durante el concierto se performan 5 canciones (*Big Poppe*, *Stargazing*, *Goosebumps*, *Sicko Mode*, *The Scott*), cada una con un mayor nivel de efectos, que modifican la visualidad de la escenografía, del mundo creado y del cuerpo de Scott, convertido constantemente en una superficie maleable, formada de fuego, hielo y otros materiales.

El espacio de la actuación presenta un escenario virtual característico del juego pero incluye también lugares acuáticos, aéreos... La actuación intenta superar la performance convencional en todo momento, lo que viene unido a la superación

3 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wYeFAIVC8qU>



Figura 3. Concierto de Travis Scott en Fortnite

de la condición física de los personajes avatares, que adaptan su acción al espacio mediante los saltos, las carreras y la falta de gravedad en el aire.

Pero el mejor ejemplo de lo que puede hacer este videojuego para la música en vivo llegó con el *Rift Tour* de Ariana Grande⁴, que vieron casi 80 millones de personas en todas sus transmisiones. La relación entre público y cantante fue muy cuidada en este caso, porque los espectadores pueden seguir a la artista por todo el espacio virtual, así como y bailar con ella (Figura 4).

El colorido y los cambios en el espacio desde lugares convencionales y otros que se producen entre escaleras flotantes, columnas y elementos móviles que vuelan en zonas entre nubes. Se emplean cinco espacios diferentes entre tierra y cielo para cantar 5 canciones (*Raindrops*, *7 rings*, *REM*, *The Way* y *Positions*).

⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gGYElBtjtU>



Figura 4. Concierto de Ariana Grande en Fortnite

Tanto el concierto de Ariana Grande como el de Travis Scott permitían cierta personalización de avatares, que podían saltar, moverse, volar y adquirir skins de los artistas en la tienda virtual e interactuar entre participantes, conectados a través del chat.

4.3. PUBG Mobile y Blackpink⁵

El juego PubG Mobile *Player Unknown's Battlegrounds* celebró un concierto virtual con el grupo de K-POP coreano Blackpink en verano de 2022, donde asistieron virtualmente unos 15 millones de personas. Fue ganador del premio al mejor performance en Metaverso (*Video Music Award for Best Metaverse Performance*). El espacio del concierto era básicamente en una actuación frontal a cámara en plano general. El cuarteto aparecía

5 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9WEf-KDts8w>

siguiendo coreografías en canciones como *DU-DuDUUU-du*, *Kill this love* y *How you like that* o *Ready for love*, que son presentados a través de un título, lo que separa la experiencia de algunas canciones a otras en el concierto.

La frontalidad de la cámara resulta distintiva así como el plano general conjunto de las cuatro integrantes: en escasos momentos se separa su visualidad o se produce un acercamiento a alguna parte del escenario o de su cuerpo virtual. La transición entre las canciones se produce con fundidos a negro clásicos o con textos. La coreografía supone otro elemento relevante y unificador del concierto: en cada pieza/canción se produce una canción o variación de la propuesta de frontalidad general de la performance.

Los avatares de las cantantes actuaron durante todo el concierto en una isla tropical, una selva, un desierto, un glaciar y un mar de flores: el gusto temático por los cristales y por una paleta de colores en torno al rosado, el violeta y gama de azules. Una de las cantantes va en monopatín a través de una cinta interminable: es esta es prácticamente la única ocasión en que se sale del escenario concierto (Figura 5).

Resulta destacable cómo modificaban su vestuario en cada track de canción, aunque la manera de moverse o cantar resultaba similar. En la grabación que se conserva del metaverso nunca existe representación de los jugadores/espectadores, aunque Ochoa Lozano (2023) describe que “Los participantes fueron trasladados a otro mundo virtual lleno de fantasía y burbujas que flotaban alrededor de las artistas. Seguidamente el concierto se desplazó a un escenario reminiscente del famoso juego de 2005 *Guitar Hero*, donde se utiliza un control para tocar música y ganar puntos, y con la canción *How You*



Figura 5. Concierto de Blackpink en PUBG Mobile

Like That se le pedía al participante hacer uso de este recurso, aunque no estaba sincronizado con la música sino más bien algo aleatorio que acompañaba el espectáculo” (Ochoa Lozano, 2023, p. 29)

4.4. Lil Nas X y Twenty one Pilots en Roblox

El rapero Lil Nas X participó en 2022⁶ en el evento más importante del videojuego *League of Legends (LoL)*, el Campeonato Mundial Worlds con la composición de STAR WALKIN, el himno del evento, que se celebró en noviembre de 2022. El videojuego y este evento tienen otros precedentes de empleo de la realidad virtual para animar estos magnos eventos de fans (Ochoa, 2023).

6 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f12ukZuUwWI>

En el mundo virtual se aprovecha el éxito de *Old Town Road* para comenzar su concierto: su vestuario propio del imaginario de la música country aunque de color rosa, hibrida la identidad transgénero del cantante con este género musical de hondas raíces patrióticas en Estados Unidos (Figura 6). Hay que apuntar que esta canción fue fuente de una gran polémica, pues fue retirada de las listas de Country tras incluirse simultáneamente en las de Billboard Hot 100, Hot Country Songs y Hot R&B/Hip-Hop Song en marzo de 2019. La controversia benefició a la promoción y propició el debate sobre los artistas afroamericanos en géneros tradicionalmente blancos.

El concierto en Roblox fue participado por Minecraft con sus famosos muñequitos, y se transmitió el 14 de noviembre de 2020. Se produjo en 4 espacios virtuales diferentes para interpretar *Old Town Road*, *Rodeo*, *Panini* y *Holiday*, con 4 vestuarios diferentes. Los escenarios virtuales creados se localizan en ambientes de exploración de la identidad que puede verse en sus videoclips: los ambientes nocturnos urbanos, los neones y los outfits bicolores (rosa y amarillo, negro y verde...) recuerdan a videoclips de canciones del artista (*Old Town Road*; *Lost in citadel*).

Fueron cinco los escenarios en el caso de *Twenty One Pilots*⁷. Destacable es la relevancia de la performance como tal, que no se abandona por un espacio diferente —conceptual o narrativo— en ningún momento: se desplaza desde el exterior urbano donde se incluye un escenario a pie de calle hasta espacios más conceptuales y oníricos (cabezas de los integrantes del

7 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0fAhhXK12o>



Figura 6. Concierto de Lil nas X en Roblox

grupo flotando en espacios abiertos). En su comienzo y tras una presentación donse se emplean textos y un marcador temporal como el de los eventos deportivos, se juega con el cambio de blanco y negro a color, lo que supone un rasgo cercano a la visualidad de muchos videoclips musicales performances. Las canciones *Saturday*, *The Outside*, *Heathens*, *Stressed Out* y *Car Radio* se performan en escenarios diversos aunque en todos aparece el cantante realizando su actuación mientras toca la guitarra, el piano o se mueve a ritmo de la música empuñando el micrófono. En casiones, las canciones se modifican con cánticos e invitaciones a la acción a los presentes, como ocurre en un concierto: esto se comprueba especialmente al final y mientras los avatares de espectadores se encuentran corriendo en una especie de carrera sobre unas líneas semejantes a una partitura.

Parece que los fans decidieron el orden de canciones, chateaban en vivo con la banda y fueron parte del público a través de la interfaz del juego: el director creativo del grupo, Mark

Eshleman (Celik, 2023), afirmó que el grupo buscaba llegar a más personas y, gracias al concierto realizado en el metaverso, interactuaron con fans nuevos.

5. Conclusiones

La espectacularidad de prácticas culturales se modifica desde la convergencia de diversas tecnologías en la generación de dispositivos y ambientes de interacción con el receptor. La industria musical es uno de los ámbitos donde se prueban de primera mano los usos tecnológicos incipientes desde la composición musical, las estrategias promocionales transmedia o la música en directo. Durante la etapa de confinamiento, el metaverso fue una manera de afrontar el aislamiento e imposibilidad de asistencia a conciertos. Las iniciativas que unían plataformas de videojuegos y proyectos musicales —grupos o músicos en solitario— en torno a este nuevo formato se multiplicaron.

Los espacios de los conciertos recrean espacios los lugares de conciertos ordinarios al menos en alguna de sus momentos, y se hibridan con exteriores fácilmente identificables con el género musical y su tradición visual, o vinculados al cantante. Junto a esto y como consecuencia de la identificación en una evolución desde 2006 —fecha del concierto de Suzanne Vega— se localiza un incremento de complejidad en las propuestas. Esto puede comprobarse especialmente en el concierto de Lil Nas X, por ejemplo.

Siguiendo con esta lógica, pueden diferenciarse las puestas en escena de Suzanne Vega, las realizadas en Fortnite y PUBG y las provenientes desde Roblox (Lil Nas X, Twenty One Pilots).

La interacción mínima asemeja el concierto en metaverso a la contemplación pasiva propia de la visualización de una película o de una obra de teatro. Así sucede en la actuación virtual de Suzanne Vega en la que los espectadores solo pueden mirar al avatar cantar sin realizar aparentes interacciones. En un nivel de interacción algo mayor, las colaboraciones ‘in-game’ de Fortnite con Ariana Grande y Travis Scott unifican secciones cinemáticas predefinidas con escenarios en los que el jugador puede moverse libremente dentro del cerco, aunque no puede haber una interacción con el resto de jugadores a la manera de Decentraland, festival que representa el entorno más parecido a un mundo abierto, en el que la interactividad no solo reside en la exploración sino también en el contacto con el metaverso y el resto de espectadores. Desde el POV, cada concierto desarrolla una línea interactiva diferente con distintas posibilidades para el espectador que le permiten experimentar en una inmersión mayor o menor. Esta inmersividad se construye desde la actividad del jugador el cual es capaz de desligarse de la realidad fáctica para construir todo un nuevo entorno a través de su percepción subjetiva.

Estos metaversos musicales son interactivos y disponen al alcance del espectador experiencias inmersivas en las que su capacidad de acción y autonomía aumenta. Lo sitúan también en un entorno virtual premeditado para provocar una acción reactiva del público, en un momento y lugar —metaversal— determinado, a la manera de los happenings o las performances musicales de Cage o los videojuegos. Al igual que estos eventos, los conciertos en metaverso se presentan en un tiempo específico en el que el internauta debe estar conectado y accesible para poder consumir dicho espectáculo. De esta manera, esa expe-

riencia se convierte en un evento único e irrepetible (Couldry, 2004). Además de su temporalidad efímera, el espacio en el que sucede es compartido simultáneamente por los jugadores conectados en la lobby, que en videojuegos como Fortnite, Minecraft o Roblox se construyen aleatoriamente, uniendo personas de todo el mundo de manera fortuita en un grupo reducido, propiciando una exclusividad circunstancial (Couldry, 2004). Este espacio, al igual que un festival tradicional, sucede en un entorno virtual con una geografía (Fraile-Jurado, 2023) y unas físicas propias. Normalmente, el componente visual suele proponer espacios metaversales irreales en los que la sensación del espectador es estar inmerso en un universo paralelo con distintos grados de similitud con la realidad. Así, cada espectáculo propone una perspectiva diferente, desde una referencia total al mundo real en el concierto de Suzanne Vega, pasando por una búsqueda de entornos similares en el concierto de Justin Bieber o los relacionados con los videoclips de Lil Nas X o hasta los viajes por el espacio y las nubes de los conciertos de Ariana Grande o BTS en Minecraft en los que la física gravitacional se rompe completamente.

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“Interventioned Images”: memory and spectatoriality

Denize Araujo

Abstract. This research aims to analyze interventioned images, resulting from the concept of aesthetics of hypervention, which provides a path from their source versions, as well as a trajectory that must be recognized by the spectator. There are four clusters of interventioned images. The first analyzes the extensions of the concept “I think, therefore I am”. The second refers to the appropriations of the source image of Mona Lisa, which has been updated in various ways. The third is about the framed images from the film *Here*, which uses AI to rejuvenate the protagonist. The fourth is about images from the film *Megalopolis* that implicitly pays homage to Jaime Lerner. The concept of “aesthetics of hypervention” brings together “hyper” as Baudrillard’s hyperreality, and “vention” as intervention. Memory has Halbwachs and Gadamer as its theoretical references, AI technology includes Santaella’s references, and spectatoriality relies on the concept of “repertorial-spectator” with a broad repertoire.

Keywords: interventioned images · memory · repertorial-spectator

Introduction

This research entitled “*Interventioned Images*”: *Memory and Spectatoriality* aims to reflect on media images, creating a new concept to connect visual arts and technologies. The main objective of the text is to prove the relevance of images that provide updates in their formats, suggesting contemporary readings, in addition to highlighting the importance of memory, which must be known by the “repertorial spectator”. This concept, coined by me, refers to the repertoire that the spectator will need to have in order to understand the strategies of the images selected for the corpus of this work.

The corpus of the text is formed by interventioned images, that is, integrated into the “aesthetics of hypervention”, a concept that I coined, with “hyper” being part of Jean Baudrillard’s concept of hyperreality and “vention” in the sense of “intervention”. Thus, interventioned images are doubly relevant images, with interventions that renew them, providing a return to the source images, evoking a selective memory on the part of the viewer and, at the same time, encouraging him/her to recognize the contemporary media accessories that complement their sources. My concept of *aesthetics of hypervention* had its beginnings in Julia Kristeva’s intertextuality, which expanded Mikhail Bakhtin’s concept of dialogism, taking it from internal use within the same text to the intertextual aspect, with insertions from one text to another.

Kristeva (2005) suggests that “every text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations, every text is the absorption and transformation of another text. In place of the notion of intersubjectivity, that of intertextuality is installed, and poetic language is read at least as double” (p. 68).

However, the transition from intertext to hypertext raises new theoretical references and terminologies appropriate to the study of technological innovations. My objective is to encourage a reflection on the hybridization of aesthetics that leads to Baudrillard’s notion of hyperreality, not in the pessimistic sense that often characterizes the author’s descriptions, but in the sense of a new scenario with insertions that lead the viewer to reread images that previously inhabited his/her imagination. In addition, there is the power of memory, which produces reflections in an attempt to create connections between the past and the present of images, based on their references. Maurice Halbwachs, in his book on collective memory, emphasizes the important role of memory:

Memory is, to a large extent, a reconstruction of the past with the help of data borrowed from the present, and, in addition, prepared by other reconstructions made in previous times and from which the image of the past manifested itself already quite altered... it is an image engaged in other images (Halbwachs, 2004, pp. 75–78).

In the present research, memory is important so that the spectator can relive the images and understand the process of insertions that will transform them into updated representations. Here we present four clusters, the first of which refers to the famous maxim “I think, therefore I am”, by the French philosopher René Descartes (1596–1650), which has been reused many times, becoming inverted, as in “I am, therefore I think”, Nietzsche’s concept, and changed to “I think, therefore I give up”. The “repertorial spectator” must know the source phrase in order to be able to assimilate the ones that follow.

The second cluster analyzes the various insertions in the source image of the *Mona Lisa*, by Leonardo da Vinci, painted in oil on wood between 1503 and 1506, which is on display at the Louvre in Paris. Here I make a comment that is pertinent to contextualize the role of the spectator. Last year, 2024, during the Paris Olympics, two incidents were reported, revealing the ignorance of those who started a debate about the images. One of the complaints was about the association of the painting *The Last Supper of Christ*, considered disrespectful to Catholics, when in fact the image was of the pagan gods of Olympus, referencing the memory of the Olympics. The other dispute was about the passage of the Minions carrying the *Mona Lisa* painting to the Seine River, with the aim of accompanying the athletes. One of the complaints was that the *Mona Lisa* painting would be unusable, when evidently the scene was fictional. Another protest was from a viewer who claimed that the painting was in the Louvre, saying that he had gone there to check it out, and was quite dissatisfied with the “lie” that was being published. From these passages, we can really see that there are many viewers who are far from being called “repertorial”.

The third cluster, perhaps the most troubled by adverse, negative and positive opinions, refers to the framed images of the film *Here* (Zemeckis, 2024), specifically the AI image of actor Tom Hanks, currently 68 years old, playing the central character, from his youth to his much more advanced age. The film, based on the graphic novel of the same name by Richard McGuire (McGuire, 2014), follows several families over generations, in a journey that covers a wide path, from the most distant past to the near future, over 104 minutes,

with the camera fixed in one spot, without ever moving, and with framed images that must be identified by the “repertorial spectator”.

The most controversial aspect of the film is the use of AI to rejuvenate the main actor. Lucia Santaella, in her text on AI in *Semeiosis* magazine, mentions that “generative AI of images in the field of creative production is bringing back, under new guises, aesthetic questions, especially techno-aesthetics, related to authorship, creativity, originality and autonomy” (Santaella, 2023, Abstract).

The fourth cluster refers to the film *Megalopolis* (Coppola, 2024), which recently premiered and received negative reviews from critics who failed to notice the implicit homage to the former mayor of Curitiba and former governor of Paraná, who was the inspiration for the character César Catalina, an urban planner with lofty ideals, played by Adam Driver. Filmmaker Coppola reported: “Curitiba helped me imagine what an ideal world would be like, where a new kind of city could exist... Curitiba represents the prototype of what I did with *Megalopolis*”, referring to innovative urban solutions (Moser, 2024).

The following segments present the images here called *interventioned* in relation to their contributions in evoking source images and updating them, exercising memory and addressing the current phase in which innovative technologies challenge viewers —requiring them to be *repertorial*, that is, to possess a relevant repertoire in order to understand the past–present link.

1. Cluster 1

This cluster refers to interventions on René Descartes' famous iconic phrase "I think, therefore I am" (*cogito, ergo sum*), originally published in the book *Discourse on the Method*, in 1637. Descartes, the founder of modern philosophy, defined what absolute knowledge would be. The Cartesian method, based on the principle of doubt and careful analysis of the object of study — "the only certainty is that I doubt, and if I doubt, I think; and if I think, therefore I exist" — can explain Friedrich Nietzsche's "I exist, therefore I think" and "I think, therefore I desist", if the viewer's repertoire includes knowledge of the origin and subsequent interventions.

These images (Figure 1) have a philosophical character, as they reproduce the original phrase, followed by Friedrich Nietzsche's intervention and a contemporary response through meditation: "Live in the present". While Descartes focuses on doubt, Nietzsche suggests that existence precedes thought. Additionally, an artistic intervention referencing another medium is introduced, as seen in the work of artist Barbara Kruger (see Figure 2).

I Shop Therefore I Am (1987), by artist and designer Barbara Kruger, is an iconic artwork, widely reproduced on consumer items such as shopping bags and T-shirts. According to Ramsey and Gallagher (2025), Kruger uses the phrase "I shop therefore I am" to suggest that the public is no longer defined by what they think, but rather by what they own. During the 1980s, society experienced a shift marked by "the economic potential of workers and expanding markets, expanding the availability of credit and encouraging homeownership and shared ownership", a change that significantly influenced patterns of consumption



Figure 1. *The Illusion of Thought*. Thinking is one of the greatest causes of suffering for humanity. It takes you away from the only reality that exists; it takes you away from the here and now. Stay here. Stay in the now. Live in the present. <https://www.ticomunicacoes.com/blog/meditacao/penso-logo-desisto/>



Figure 2. *I Shop Therefore I Am*. Barbara Kruger – 1987/2019, single-channel video on LED panel, sound, 57 sec, 350.1 × 351.1 cm (137 7/8 × 138 1/4 inches), installation view, courtesy of David Zwirner. <https://publicdelivery.org/barbara-kruger-i-shop/>

(Ramsey & Gallagher, 2025, para. 8). With this artwork, Kruger expresses concern that society has strayed from essential values and evolved into a plastic society, one where individuals focus more on “what they have rather than who they are” (Ramsey & Gallagher, 2025, para. 11). Through subtle humor and wordplay referencing Descartes’ iconic maxim, Kruger uses this piece to question the true value placed on material possessions.

Considering that one of the relevant objectives of this research is the role of the spectator, it is assumed that the minimum repertoire for understanding the images above includes knowledge of the rationale behind René Descartes’ formulation of the phrase “*I think, therefore I am*”, which stimulated the other three interventions. In an attempt to connect two clusters, it is suggested that Barbara Kruger’s message in *I Shop Therefore I Am* can be linked to Cluster 2, which also includes images that reference consumerism —or at least the advertising of media products— through interventions that update the source images of Leonardo da Vinci’s *Mona Lisa*, one of the most intertextualized images in the world. The extent of this intertextuality is evidenced by the 10,062 photographs featuring versions of the painting archived in the *Domus–Casa del Hombre Museum* in A Coruña (Eixo Atlántico, n.d.).

2. Cluster 2

This cluster brings together the “interventioned images” of *Mona Lisa* in her various settings, some easily identified (first row below), and others that require a viewer to be able to identify the *Mona Lisa – Botero*, the *Mona Lisa – Duchamp*, the *Gioconda Sapiens*, and the *Niba Lisa Arthur Spacek*.

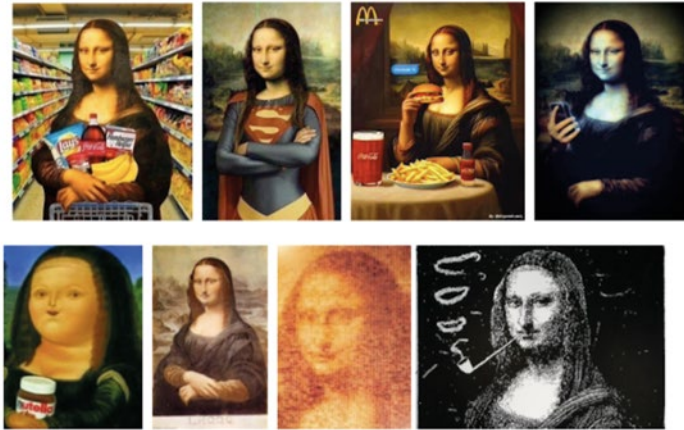


Figure 3. *Mona Lisa*. Series of images of the *Mona Lisa* retrieved from a Google Images search <https://www.google.com/search?q=images+of+mona+lisa>

This series of images of the *Mona Lisa* (Figure 3) reflects the relevance of Leonardo da Vinci’s 1503 source image, currently in the Louvre in Paris since 1797. According to the *Guinness World Record*, the *Mona Lisa* is the most valuable painting in the world, valued at US\$100 million in 1962, equivalent to \$1 billion in 2023. The image of the *Mona Lisa* has been and continues to be an inspiration for many artists. According to Érika de Moraes, in her 2013 article *Mona Lisa: multiple meanings of an enigmatic smile* in SciELO:

We can therefore understand that, more than an intertextuality, the various representations of Mona Lisa circulate an interdiscursivity. Certain discourses, such as that on the enigmatic aspect of human expression, materialize in this dispersion of texts that are

reinterpretations of Da Vinci's painting, which range from the works of famous painters, both classical and modern, to children's school activities. (Moraes, 2013)

For this research, the value of memory is of vital importance. Therefore, I selected some "interventioned images" that can lead the viewer to understand the trajectory of the *Mona Lisa* in its new settings. According to Gaston Bachelard,

Great images have both a history and a prehistory. They are always a memory and a legend at the same time. One never experiences the image in its first instance. Any great image has an unfathomable dreamlike background and it is on this that the personal past adds particular colors. (Bachelard, 1993, p. 50)

For this cluster, I selected images that require the "repertorial-spectator". Although some settings are easily recognizable, such as those in the top row, the images by Botero, Duchamp, Gioconda Sapiens and Arthur Spacek require repertoire and knowledge of the past. Fernando Botero's image, *Mona Lisa Age Twelve*, was produced in 1978 and is in the Botero Museum in Bogotá, Colombia. His own style, that is, his round figures, are a reflection of his social critique of human greed, but in this image reproduced here there is an insertion, a can of Nutella, which could lead to a misinterpretation that the round figures represent fat people, which is not the case in relation to Fernando Botero's images. Thus, in this image, the viewer must have the necessary knowledge to decipher both connotations, the "Botero" and the insertion of Nutella. The second image belongs to Marcel Duchamp. *L.H.O.O.Q.*, the *objet trouvé*

(“found object”), from 1919, is a postcard that reproduces the work of the *Mona Lisa* in which Duchamp drew a mustache and a goatee in pencil and gave it the title. According to Archer and Schlichta (2016), in the article *L.H.O.O.Q.: The status of art explored by Marcel Duchamp*:

Duchamp refused to create works that would attract the public visually, since his intention was to connect art with intellectuality. He created works not only thinking about the visual aspect of the work when finished, but also about the idea it conveyed. The work, in addition to being a reinterpretation, intends to take the *Mona Lisa* out of the academic and traditional axes, and to criticize the consumption of art itself. (Archer & Schlichta, 2016)

Just like Botero, who with his “boterism” criticizes human greed, Duchamp, best known for his work *Fountain*, criticizes consumerism, inserting details in the *Mona Lisa* that challenge the viewer.

The third image is the *Gioconda Sapiens*, a recreation of Leonardo da Vinci’s painting made with photographs of 10,062 people from 110 countries, which is located in La Coruña, in the Domus–Casa del Hombre Museum. The Casa del Hombre is a scientific and cultural museum built on the Riazor Promenade in the city of A Coruña, in the Autonomous Community of Galicia. It is the first interactive museum that deals with the human being in a global and monographic way, having been inaugurated on April 7, 1995. Located in a building designed by the Japanese architect Arata Isozaki, this museum was designed to attract visitors and stimulate their knowledge. Through the different exhibits, the different characteristics of

the human species are discovered, such as the Self (identity), We (demography), the Senses, the Heart, the Motor System, the Brain, Skills and Language. In this scenario, little known to most spectators, the recreation of the image of the *Mona Lisa* gains a significant impact, requiring the “repertorial spectator” with reading and knowledge.

The fourth image, *Mona Lisa with a Kite*, is by Arthur Spacek, the pseudonym under which the French illustrator and performer Eugène Bataille became known. Admittedly eccentric, Spacek produced, in 1883, in the second show of the *Incoherents*, a close-up and white *Mona Lisa*, smoking a pipe. His work was considered avant-garde of movements such as Dadaism and Surrealism. The *Incoherents* (*Les Arts Incohérents*) was a short-lived French artistic movement founded in 1882 by the Parisian writer and publisher Jules Lévy. His work from 1883 may have encouraged the creation of the image made by Marcel Duchamp in 1919.

3. Cluster 3

Cluster 3 refers to the use of AI —Artificial Intelligence— in images and begins with this information, which links Cluster 2 and Cluster 3, with the image of the *Mona Lisa* with AI technology (see Figure 4), published in *Época Negócios Globo*:

An image recently went viral when it portrayed a “rare photograph of *Mona Lisa* and Leonardo da Vinci taken in Florence in 1504”. Generated by artificial intelligence, the photo confused internet users and raised suspicions as to whether it was real or not.



Figure 4. *Da Vinci and Mona Lisa*. AI-generated image <https://epocanegocios.globo.com/inteligencia-artificial/noticia/2023/11/ia-cria-fotografia-de-da-vinci-e-mona-lisa-nos-anos-1500.ghtml>

AI technology has created divergences in its images and in its uses in various segments. In this cluster, the analysis focuses on AI images from the film *Here* (USA, 2024), by Robert Zemeckis, in order to record both sides of the issue regarding AI. The film shows Tom Hanks, the lead actor, who is currently 68 years old, in a much younger version, perhaps 20 years old, when portraying his character. One of the most scathing criticisms was that of Lisa Kudrow, the protagonist of Phoebe, a character in the series *Friends*, who took a stand by arguing that AI is taking the place of actors and that in the future there will be no work for human beings. Her criticisms were made during her participation in the podcast *Armchair Expert*. According to the actress, the film confirms and accepts the use of AI, endorsing the actor's rejuvenation:

It sounded like an endorsement of AI to me. It's not like it's going to ruin everything, but what's going to be left? Forget established actors, what about up-and-coming actors? Are studios just going to license and recycle? What jobs will there be for humans? (Kudrow, 2024, as cited in *The Guardian*, 2024).

On the other hand, we have Tom Hanks' statements (see Figure 5). The actor defended the use of digital rejuvenation technology in the film *Here* believing that the technology allowed the cast to appear younger when playing different stages of life: "It's an incredible tool because the supercomputer eliminates the need to wait for post-production to do the technical work of visualization", the actor explained to *Radio Times* magazine (as cited in CNN Brasil, 2024). For the actor, the evolution of artificial intelligence tools is not a problem.

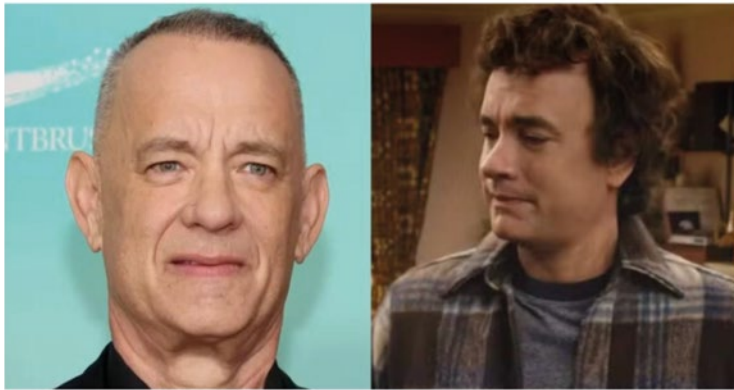


Figure 5. Tom Hanks. Reprinted from *Tom Hanks: Inteligências Artificiais e Legado* by Omelete, n.d. <https://www.omelete.com.br/filmes/tom-hanks-inteligencias-artificiais-legado>

In March 2025, the actor said that his work could continue even after his death. “Anyone can recreate themselves at any age they are... I can get hit by a bus tomorrow and I’ll still be in movies”, the Oscar winner declared, arguing that viewers won’t care if the on-screen performance is done by the actor himself or by a computerized resource (Hanks, 2025, as cited in CNN Brasil, 2025).

In 2022, in his book *Neo-Humano A 7th Cognitive Revolution of Sapiens*, published by Editora Paulus, the researcher Lucia Santaella stated:

We can say that artificial intelligence is here to stay, to grow and to multiply. Currently, what we thought a human being was is being questioned. What is the human mind when it goes into a device? What is the body today in the face of so many technologies like

chips and GPS? What are we humans, what is left of us, of what we thought we were, now that we have become hybrids between carbon and silicon? (Santaella,2022).

In 2023, Santaella, in her article *The expansion of human intelligence* in the Revista da Univ. Federal e Minas Gerais, impartially and bilaterally analyzes the arguments for and against AI-Artificial Intelligence. The author demonstrates in-depth knowledge of the subject and reaches extremely well-elaborated conclusions:

If we continue to think about the relationship between humans and AI in an oppositional way, based on values inherited from the Enlightenment (subject, individualism, intentionality, free will, etc.), that is, values that fuel egocentrism and that were demolished by the philosophy of distrust (Foucault, Deleuze, Derrida, Lyotard, which unfortunately so few have read), our understanding of AI will be trapped in the sensationalist imbroglio (for the sake of the media) in which we find ourselves. (Santaella, 2023)

Santaella concludes by suggesting that

In fact, from the confrontation between AI and human intelligence, a paradox arises: what is difficult for humans, AI does, what is difficult for AI, humans do. In reality, they are two distinct types of intelligence and, because they are distinct, Regardless of whether or not we are proud of human intelligence, this does not allow us to deny the cognitive potential and expression of intelligence in AI, without denying that there are characteristics and properties that act as obstacles for both to be equal. What

can be concluded from Lecun (2018, p. 133) is that AI systems will amplify human intelligence in the same way that mechanical machines were an amplification of physical strength. They will not be a replacement. In short, we should foresee a future in which computer systems will have complementary abilities to human ones, functioning much more like an augmented intelligence in the union of two distinct types of intelligence. (Santaella, 2023)

Other relevant texts also make explicit their points of view that interact with Santaella’s considerations. The authors Jefferson Santos, Paulo Boa Sorte, and Emanuelle Barros, in the article *Artificial Intelligence in Movies: The Potential for Critical Linguistic Education (Journal of Research and Knowledge Spreading)* conclude that (Santos, Boa Sorte, & Barros, 2022, p. 10).

the interplay of artificial intelligence in our daily lives, emphasized and dramatized by cinematographic works for a long time, can contribute to the expansion and possibility of a critical linguistic education, informing paths on unstable ground, inevitably directed by mobile devices connected to the internet whose algorithmic modulation needs to account for the filters, bubbles, feeds and multiplatforms that challenge the so-called traditional media. (Santos, Boa Sorte, & Barros, 2022, p. 10).

The authors Stuart Russel and Peter Norvig, in their text *Artificial Intelligence: A Modern Approach*, from 2021, mention that artificial intelligence is a field of scientific knowledge that allows us to understand essential and complex elements of the human mind (Russell & Norvig, 2021).

Considering that the objective of this research is to analyze the role of the spectator in scenarios of hyperventilated images, we can consider the relevant aspects of the film *Here*, which is an adaptation of the graphic novel of the same name by Richard McGuire, which narrates the events in a single setting, that is, the living room of a house, from where the spectators can follow the facts from the creation of the world, the life of the dinosaurs and the indigenous people, to the American War of Independence, industrial development, the Covid-19 pandemic, among other events. From the living room window, one can see a colonial property that belonged to William Franklin, son of Benjamin Franklin, who was one of the great leaders of the American Revolution. Thus, the house holds memories of several generations. In addition, the film presents frames of images relevant to the setting where the events take place.

This image (Figure 6) above brings together moments that range from the beginning of the protagonist couple's participation to their most advanced age. It is a film that encourages memory, enabling knowledge of several relevant moments in American history.

Maurice Halbwachs, in his book *Collective Memory*, highlights that "by history we must understand not a chronological succession of events and dates, but everything that makes one period distinguish itself from others" (Halbwachs, 1990, p. 60). In the film *Here*, history and the memory of the past share the same scenarios, and the protagonists reveal to the spectators historical moments of collective memory, evidencing what Hans-Georg Gadamer calls "fusion of horizons": "In fact, the horizon of the present is continually being formed... An important part of this test is the encounter with the past and the understanding of the



Figure 6. *Poster of the film Here.* This movie poster was retrieved from MyMovies.it and represents the official promotional artwork for *Here* (2024), directed by Robert Zemeckis



Figure 7. *Scene 1* – Here. This image was taken from the official trailer of *Here* <https://www.somostodosum.com.br/artigos/auto-conhecimento/a-jornada-atemporal-do-filme-here-18536.html>



Figure 8. *Scene 2* – Here. This image was taken from the film *Here*



Figure 9. *Scene 3 – Here.* This image was taken from the film *Here*

tradition from which we come... Understanding, then, is always the fusion of these horizons” (Gadamer, 1999, p. 273). The following scenes were taken from the film by author Denize Araujo.

Scene 1 (see Figure 7), above, shows the framed images from the film *Here*, emphasizing certain scenes in the living room of the house, as well as one about Native Americans. Scene 2 (see Figure 8), below, shows the main character, framed in the living room and painting scenes shown in the film. After other activities, the protagonist returns to dedicating himself to his paintings on canvases, which also interact with the framed images that define the film’s montage.

Scene 3 (see Figure 9), below, frames actor Tom Hanks in the living room, a unique setting in the film, which shows different periods of residents and visitors.

In Scene 4 (see Figure 10), the actor is older, in the same room where he spent his life. The frame shows a family party. The film portrays important events in American culture, from the creation of the world to the near future, including Covid 19.



Figure 10. *Scene 4 – Here.* This image was taken from the film *Here*

Zemeckis' most relevant innovations are in the editing of the frames, positioned to include the characters in historical intersections, and in the creative way the still camera focuses on the living room of the house built in the US colonial period. The art direction uses digital effects, including AI, for the actors and for the remodeling of the room, which follows the trajectory of the scenes. The framed images identify the most relevant moments and the characters' reactions to the passage of time. Tom Hanks' character's family is followed from his youth, including his marriage, the normal relationship problems, the separation and the return. The last scene of the film portrays the elderly couple remembering the moments spent in that room. Viewers should also follow the unfolding of the images, which require a repertoire of the periods covered in the film. Memory is necessary, as is knowledge of American civilization in its most relevant periods. In homage to the selected images and their creators, here is the epigraph by Pierre Nora,

taken from his book *Between Memory and History*, which I considered appropriate, considering not only creativity, but also the invitation to a cultural immersion in collective memory:

History, as a representation of the past, is linked to temporal continuities and discontinuities, and is therefore an intellectual operation that demands analysis and critical discourse. Memory, affective and magical, emerges from a group that it unites; it is multiple, accelerated, collective, plural and individualized. (Nora, 1993)

The quote above corroborates with this research, in the sense that it mentions the past in its temporal continuities, which is one of the objectives of this analysis, and also in mentioning the affective and magical memory that describes the images described here (Nora, 1993).

4. Cluster 4

Cluster 4 analyzes the film *Megalopolis* (Coppola, 2024), by Francis Ford Coppola, and is focused on the theme of spectatoriality. Some critics published negative reviews, without knowing the reasons for the director’s choices, who announced his inspiration especially for the staging of the main character, Cesar Catilina, and for Rome in its new version. Coppola visited Curitiba in 2003, when he got to know the innovations of the city implemented by Jaime Lerner (see Figure 11). On the site *Cinema com Rapadura*, it was reported: “Francis Ford Coppola disse que a cidade Nova Roma e o personagem de Adam Driver em *Megalópolis* foram inspirados na cidade de



Figure 11. *Megalópolis*. Press coverage of Coppola's visit to Curitiba

Curitiba, do Paraná, e no ex-governador Jaime Lerner. O diretor conheceu a cidade em 2003 e começou a desenvolver o filme” (Cinema com Rapadura, 2024).

During an interview in September 2024, filmmaker Francis Ford Coppola explained that meeting Jaime Lerner, former governor of Paraná (1995–2003), inspired him to develop

Cesar Catilina, the protagonist of *Megalopolis*. The character, played by Adam Driver, is an urban planner with a utopian vision for the fictional city of New Rome. Coppola was in Curitiba in 2003, when he met Jaime Lerner. On August 2, I invited him and he gave a lecture to the students of the Postgraduate Program in Cinema that I coordinate. These students and everyone who followed Coppola’s journey in Curitiba could be what I called “repertorial-spectators”. In this specific case, the information in the film is quite implicit, only benefiting those who know the inspiration behind the film *Megalopolis*. When he came back in 2024, Coppola visited the Jaime Lerner Institute, coordinated by his daughter Ilana. Jaime Lerner’s memory is honored at the Ópera de Arame. Coppola’s visits here are shown in images that have already been widely disseminated (Coppola, personal communication, September 2024).

Conclusion

After analyzing the “interventioned images”, the main objective of this research, it concludes that their memories and trajectories were exposed in their source images in the corpus of this research. The term *interventioned images* comes from my concept of *aesthetics of hypervention*, that is, *hyper* in the positive sense of Baudrillard’s hyperreality and *vention* in the sense of intervention.

The relevant place of memory was also analyzed, considering that today’s images concentrate in themselves the images of the past, now interventioned, creating a hyperreality, considered

here in four clusters. Spectatoriality was also considered as one of the main objectives, with *repertoire* being considered the knowledge of the spectator who must be capable of understanding the nuances of each image, in some more explicit and easy to be identified, in others requiring a repertoire on the selected theme. Cluster 2, on the images of the Mona Lisa, for example, brings four images that are easy to understand and another four that require prior knowledge in order to explain the philosophical concepts that underpin the interventions in Leonardo da Vinci's source image.

Cluster 3, on the recent film *Here* (2024), which has provoked controversy regarding the use of AI —Artificial Intelligence— also requires “repertorial-spectators” capable of analyzing the film according to their understanding and readings about AI. At this point, our citations on the studies of the researcher Lucia Santaella are of enormous value, considering her impartial, ambivalent points of view, analyzing both sides of the issue and bringing truly important results for the analyses conducted here.

Other relevant references are those of Maurice Halbwachs and Hans-Georg Gadamer, on memory, which is an extremely important topic for this research. The “repertorial-spectator” must know the source-origin of the images and their trajectories to reach a complete understanding. The film *Megalopolis* received some negative critics and can be considered the most difficult to be completely understood thanks to its references that are not known by many spectators who are not aware of Coppola's visit to Curitiba and his interest in the city's development made by Governor Jaime Lerner. The film's main character is a tribute to Lerner and New Rome to Curitiba.

Returning to Cluster 1, which deals with the maxims of René Descartes and Friedrich Nietzsche, I include here the film *Sofies Verden* (Norway, 1999), which really asks for a repertorial-spectator, including Descartes, Nietzsche, Bjerkely, Kant, Hegel, Kierkegaard, Freud and other philosophers. I end here my conclusion with the intervention “I think, therefore I research”, considering the relevance of the role of researchers, of all of us!

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Brand Communication in Virtual Reality: the consumer perspective through user testing experiences

Eduardo Zilles Borba

Abstract. This work researches on how users understand brand communication in Virtual Reality (VR). In addition to acknowledge how the audience perceives brands' messages, this work also explores the user appropriations of technological devices and the effects of believability on these techno-experiences (audiovisual realism, interactions and storytelling engagement). As methodology a series of practical tests were applied with users in VR lab following a research protocol. The data were collected by observing ten users testing two advertising pieces followed by in-depth interviews. All collected data were analyzed in a qualitative way, based on three dimensions: brand communication, user appropriations and effects of believability. Results indicate that users perceive VR as an innovative media to reinforce brand positioning, culture and proposes.

Keywords: virtual reality · brand communication · visual culture · user tests · advertising

1. Introduction

The use of Virtual Reality (VR) devices has allowed brands to create immersive, participatory and engaging communication experiences with their audiences. In fact, its characteristics of imitating the aesthetics and functionalities of physical reality (Qin & Lei, 2019) or even the possibility of designing imaginary realities (Van de Mosselaer & Gualeni, 2022) in immersive contexts can be understood as a differential of VR as a media communication platform for marketing and advertising.

Exclusively thinking about the use of VR for brand communication, De Gauquier *et al.* (2019) explain that it can be used as a media tool that generates engaging, participatory and performative experiences for the consumer. In other words, it enhances actions focused on experiential marketing (Kotler, Kartajaya & Setiawan, 2017). So, brands find in VR platforms a way to optimize relationship with potential buyers. For example, some brand may use the user's natural interactivity with virtual objects to promote situations of experimentation of a product, allowing the user to handle it in VR, understanding in a practical way how does its works and which are its qualities (Brenngman, Willems & De Gauquier, 2022), while other brand creates realistic situations to demonstrate the differences in their services (De Gauquier *et al.* 2019).

This research presents an exploratory and experimental approach, in order to study how the user can understand brand communication in VR. In addition to acknowledge how audience perceives the brands' messages, this work also explores the user appropriations of technological devices and the effects of believability on these techno-experiences (audiovisual realism, human-computer interactions and storytelling engagement).

As methodology, more than presenting a theoretical basis on VR and brand communication, a laboratory experiment was conducted with ten volunteers who explored two advertising pieces from different brands through the use of VR equipment. This empirical exploration carried out by the users was conducted individually and was organized by a user test protocol specifically developed for exploring brand communication in VR. After the explorations, each user underwent an in-depth interview session, when were collected qualitative data on their perception of the brand communication, the use of VR devices and the believability of the experience. Results indicate that users perceive VR as an innovative media to communicate brand positioning, culture and social proposes.

2. Brand communication in virtual reality

Considering VR an emerging digital media which provides peculiar forms of content production (emission) and exploration (reception), it is also assumed that some of its properties (of the medium itself) produce sociotechnical and semiotic phenomena that, until then, were not produced by audiovisual digital media, such as: television, computer, mobile phone or tablet. Zilles Borba (2020) suggest the sense of expanding a flat screen experience to a 360° stage where the content is perceived as natural scale all-around the user or, even, the immersion feeling generated by a multisensory interface connected with a full body narrative, were two examples of VR platform characteristics which stimulate the person to have a new understanding of content in digital media (Figure 1).

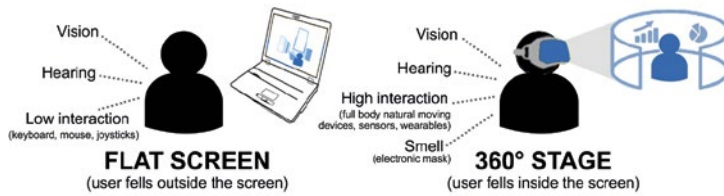


Figure 1. Expanding the user experience beyond the digital flat screen. Adapted from Zilles Borba (2020)

Indeed, assuming the existence of an innovative power intrinsic to the VR media characteristics —at least to offer to the user a new way of exploring, perceiving and understanding digital content (Bolter & Grusin, 2003)— it is important to point out that the communication process is linked to a triad of relationships and intersections between the user, the technological devices and the digital environment. That is, the agency existing in a communication process in VR always depends on the mediation of the technical device connecting a person to the content environment (Ferreira, 2007; Zilles Borba, 2018). However, as already mentioned, this agency brings interesting features to the subject’s understanding of spaces, objects, interactions and even their own body or reality when exploring such techno-experiences.

About VR and advertising, it’s important to keep in mind the peculiar characteristics intrinsic to the media. After all, brands have a major interest of create engaging, participatory and captivating experiences with consumers through immersive media. So, VR environments reveal a potential to cause sense of presence and immersion that may become pertinent for brand

communication (Kim, 2021). For example, De Gauquier *et al.* (2019) indicate the immersive experiences may help brands to create participatory plot in the VR environment resulting in emotional connections with the audience. So, VR open up opportunities for a brand to work on its advertising and persuasive communication for various purposes, whether commercial, in the sense of demonstrating products through a simulation allowing the user to have a multisensory and realistic notion of its characteristics (Qin; Lei, 2019; De Gauquier *et al.*, 2019); or social, in the sense of teleporting the user to a distant space, in order to demonstrate in an immersive and participatory way some environmental preservation actions that may be part of a company's social policies (Dores, 2016; Kotler, Kartajaya; Setiawan, 2017).

As final topic in this theoretical chapter, it is imperative to explain the believability concept in VR and its application for brand communication. In this work, believability indicates “any (and all) complexity existing in the phenomena of immersion [...] and sense of presence [...] when both acts concurrently in the user experience in VR” (Borba, 2024, p. 81). So, believability is a term used to explain when sensorial (the body) (Pereira, 2008) and mental (the mind) (Pausch *et al.*, 1996) properties are modulated in the VR experience. To dissect the effects of believability in a VR advertising pieces, Borba (2022) —based in theories of (Pausch *et al.*, 1996; Slater & Wilbur, 1997; Bolter & Grusin, 2021; Kerrebroeck, Brengman & Willems, 2017; De Gauquier *et al.*, 2019, and others)— presented three attributes to be observed: realism (audiovisual, aesthetics), interactivity (exploration, navigation) and engagement (plot, storytelling, attention transfer).

3. Methodology

Considering this work aims to research on how users perceive brand communication in VR, seeking to understand how they understand the advertising message, but also how they do appropriate of VR devices and how the effects of believability act in these techno-experiences, it was considered to apply an experimental and qualitative methodology. So, additional to the theory review already presented, it was conducted a series of user tests in the university VR laboratory. The tests followed an experiment protocol created specifically for the study of brand communication in VR (Table 1). During those experiments, users placed themselves in the position of a brand communication receiver by wearing VR devices to explore the digital environment (Oculus Rift S, motion trackers, joysticks and headphones).

Data collection was performed with a sample of ten users who volunteered to participate in the tests. All of them were undergraduate students in Advertising in the same university the researcher works. So, they were selected by convenience without the need for prior knowledge or experience with VR. The ten users were divided into two groups: Group A (Jeep), consisting of five people who explored a passive VR advertising experience in which was possible to identify a lot of audiovisual content, but low interactivity; and Group B (Ikea), also consisting of five people, but who interacted with an active VR advertising experience in which was possible to identify a lot of audiovisual content with high interactivity. Both ads had a storyline to be followed by the users, which, in some way, sought to attract their attention and generate some brand engagement.

The Vr Experiment Protocol		
Time	Moment	Actions taken
5 min.	Reception at the lab	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome; • Explain the research topic; • Detail on how the VR experience will work (the piece to be explored and the exploration time); • Indicate that data collected from the participant will be used anonymously, without any type of identification that could reveal who the participants are; • Present the consent form authorization and request permission through the participant's signature (two copies, one for the participant and other for the researcher). • Warn about the need to use VR equipment without glasses, due to the need to wear the HMD on the face.
7 min.	Technical guidance on the experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check the user's previous experience (if any) with VR; • Warn about adverse symptoms that may be increased with the use of VR during the same day, especially in elderly people, pregnant women, those with heart problems or psychomotor disorders (e.g. labyrinthitis), including: imbalance, nausea, dizziness and blurred vision. • Provide instructions on how to use the equipment in the room to be explored; • Ask about comfort and aspects of the materiality; • Show a demo experience, lasting approximately one minute, in order to check for discomfort, nausea or dizziness before starting the official experience.
10-12 min.	Conducting the experiment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Start the user experience without the need to complete tasks or requirements (explore freely); • At the beginning of the participant's experience, the researcher should start the audiovisual recording and the clock timer; • During participant's experience, the researcher should observe and note curious situations, movements and/or important statements; • During the participant's experience, the researcher should be available to answer questions. • End the experience after 15 minutes, if the participant has not finished it beforehand.
25-30 min.	Reflection of the experience (interview)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apply in-depth semi-structured interview with the user (series of questions —see Table 2).
5 min.	Closing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thank the person for the participation and release the participant; • Sanitize the VR equipment for the next user test.

Table 1. Protocol carried out during the user tests in lab. Source: the researcher (2025)

Technoexperience, Appropriations and Ways of Using VR	
1	How was your experience with the VR equipment (HMD, headsets, joysticks, motion sensors)?
2	While you were in the VR environment, what did you feel about your physical body (for example, was it important or was there a connection between it and the experience? And about your virtual body (the body of the avatar that represented you, for example, did you understand as being yours)?
3	Did you feel sensorially immersed in the experience (seeing, hearing, moving, touching)? Describe it.
4	Did you feel mentally present in the experience (the story, the understanding, the plot)? Describe it.
5	When you reflect on the experience you just had, do you remember about a place you visited or images you saw in a digital environment?
Believability in the VR Experience	
6	On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being less and 5 being more), what degree of visual realism did you consider in the experience (shapes, design, scales, proportions, colors, textures, graphic realism)? Explain it.
7	On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being less and 5 being more), what degree of sound realism did you consider in the experience (timbres, sound locations, durations, volumes, music, sound effects)? Explain it.
8	On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being less and 5 being more), how would you rate the interactivity in the experience? Only consider aspects of scenario navigation and object manipulation. Explain it.
9	On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being less and 5 being more), how do you rate the tactile sensations of the experience? Only consider touching objects, the materiality of possible physical structures that influenced the virtual experience and/or the temperatures.
10	On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being less and 5 being more), how would you rate your engagement with the experience? Consider how much the play grabbed your attention, captivated you, or kept you connected to the plot, whether because you were scared, curious, having fun, having a mission, and others.

Table 2. Script for in-depth semi-structured interviews. Source: the researcher (2025) based on Pausch *et al.* (1996), Slater and Wilbur (1997), Usuh *et al.* (2000), Zilles Borba (2018), De Gauquier *et al.* (2019)

Brand Communication in VR	
11	On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being less and 5 being more), were you satisfied with the communication experience provided by the ad/piece? Explain it.
12	Can you summarize the communication message of the advertisement/piece?
13	What is your perception of the product/service/idea advertised? Has this perception changed after experiencing the VR piece?
14	On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being less and 5 being more), does this product/service spark any interest in your consumption? Explain it.
15	Do you believe that this VR experience brought any benefits to the brand? Explain it.
16	Did experiencing the VR piece produce any change in the way you perceive this brand (fun, technological, sincere, sophisticated, inclusive, deceitful, or others)?

Table 2 (cont'd). Script for in-depth semi-structured interviews. Source: the researcher (2025) based on Pausch *et al.* (1996), Slater and Wilbur (1997), Usoh *et al.* (2000), Zilles Borba (2018), De Gauquier *et al.* (2019)

It is important to highlight that these two advertising pieces in VR were selected by the researcher merely because they're digital products made available free of charge by Meta on its public VR platform. The two pieces explored in the user tests were from the brands Jeep (cars) and Ikea (furniture and household appliances).

After experiencing the tests individually, each user participated in an in-depth semi-structured interview (Table 2). Interviews were recorded solely for the researcher's data consultation purposes and were not used for any publication. It is important to emphasize that participants signed a consent form authorizing the video recording and the use of their statements and opinions, even they're presented anonymously in this research.

In order to analyze data collected through observations of the users' practices, as well as through conversations in the in-depth interviews, they were organized into three categories and them qualitatively analyzed: 1) Appropriations and ways of using VR; 2) Effects of believability in the VR advertising experience; and 3) Receiving the brand communication in VR.

4. User experience in VR advertising: the consumer perspective through user tests

As explained in the methodological procedures, ten users were selected to experience two VR advertising pieces (Jeep and Ikea) and, then, answer some questions through an in-depth semi-structured interview. This procedure was important to deepen the understanding of relationships between user, devices and VR environment generated by both brands. After all, data was extracted from the user responses to study sensitive, performative and subjective aspects of their advertising reception.

When observing each of the practical experiences with the VR devices, it was noted that the vast majority of participants were not familiar with using the equipment. Despite being undergraduate students in Advertising, none of them actually had the device at home for domestic use. Due to this particularity of the sample profile, it was considered to conduct a brief exploration of a VR scenario with the main objective of showing to the participants how to use VR devices and what it feels like to wear a VR goggle. None of these experiences had a negative impact, embarrassment

Participant	Age	Genre	Period in the course	VR brand experience	Already used VR?	I knew the brand
P1	24	M	5th semester	Jeep	No	Yes
P2	21	F	5th semester	Jeep	No	Yes
P3	23	M	5th semester	Jeep	Yes	Yes
P4	22	F	6th semester	Jeep	Yes	Yes
P5	27	M	6th semester	Jeep	No	Yes
P6	27	F	5th semester	Ikea	Yes	No
P7	22	M	4th semester	Ikea	No	Yes
P8	25	F	6th semester	Ikea	Yes	Yes
P9	23	M	4th semester	Ikea	Yes	Yes
P10	23	M	7th semester	Ikea	No	Yes

Table 3. Profile of the sample of participants in the user test.
Source: the researcher (2025)

or any technical or health or disposition problems, which is something important to note. Furthermore, it is worth noting that this initial experience of exploring a VR environment had nothing to do with the two advertising pieces that served as research object and, therefore, did not generate any impact or conditioning on the perception of the brands' communication.

The profile of participants in the VR experiment presented a balance for the research, because, although they were all Brazilian undergraduate students in Advertising, between the ages of 21 and 27, the following separations were identified: gender (six males and four females), period in the course (two in the 4th period, four in the 5th period, three in the 6th period, and one in the 7th period), use of VR devices (five had already

used them and five had never used them), knowledge about the brand (nine knew the brand and one did not know it). Below, those profile details are presented (Table 3).

4.1. Appropriations and ways of using VR

It was possible to identify that all of the users felt comfortable wearing the VR headset. Expressions such as “I didn’t find the headset heavy” (P2), “the glasses were comfortable on my face” (P4), “the glasses and headphones fit well on my eyes and ears” (P7), were fundamental to understanding that the devices materialities did not generated problems for experiencing the immersive journey, being elements of physical reality that, despite being tangible, did not block the sensation of immersion in the digital simulation.

Several participants indicated that it was important to have a short experience, as this did not cause fatigue or discomfort when using the equipment (P1, P2, P4, P6, P7, P9 and P10). “Since the Jeep experience only lasted 4 to 5 minutes, it was quite easy. If the experience had lasted 15 minutes, it would start to weigh on the mind and be a little uncomfortable” (P2). In any case, it is important to underline that some participants reported the need to adjust the equipment to find a point of comfort, as before that, the goggles bothered their face or nose and even generated a feeling of blurring images in the virtual environment (Zilles Borba, 2020). P1, for example, reported that after fitting the goggles to his face and adjusting the lenses, everything was as expected for seeing, hearing and interacting with the digital environment.

Regarding to the joysticks/controllers, there was a mix of feelings among the participants. For example, P2, P3, P6, P7, P9 and P10 found it easy and intuitive to have the controls in their hands to perform interactions. P10 explained that he found interesting the use of triggers to grab virtual objects and to keep them in his hand during the experience. “It was cool to know that I could release the trigger and the objects would automatically be released by my virtual hand” (P10). Regarding this mechanic interactions, P9 highlighted that using joysticks reminded him of video games, therefore he had no problems using them (Pereira, 2008). In turn, P1, P4, P5 and P8 had some difficulty using the controls, buttons and directional pads. P4 indicated the joysticks were comfortable and light, but their buttons were very sensitive, requiring a great care not to accidentally touch them with his fingers and, therefore, press a random option that was not desired.

Still on equipment and materiality in the VR techno-experience, it was understood that devices’ wires and cables—as none of them were wireless—caused discomfort among participants. This was especially true in the Ikea experience, because they had to move and gesture and, as a result, ended up getting tangled up or bumping their legs into the wires. It remind that exploring new media or the remediation of media may take a little time for people understand its mechanics and ways of use (Bolter & Grusin, 2003).

Another point on the ways of using VR was the participants’ understanding of their relationship between the physical body and the digital body, in the sense of interpreting the immersion feeling, whether because of the objective (sensory) or subjective (mental) stimuli generated in the relationship between user,

device and digital environment (Slater & Wilbur, 1997). There was a division of opinions among participants who lived the Jeep and Ikea advertising experiences. While the five participants who experienced the first brand (P1, P2, P3, P4 and P5) did not perceive any type of connection between their physical body and the virtual one, the other five volunteers who explored the Ikea environment indicated that their physical body was a fundamental agent in the experience (P6, P7, P8, P9 and P10). This is justified by the fact that in the first experience the user had an immersive participation that in fact placed him/her as a privileged spectator within the advertising scene (Kim, 2021), while in the Ikea VR piece the user was the protagonist of the scene (Qin & lei, 2019), being required to use his/her entire body (arms, hands, legs) to cook pancakes (Borba, 2024).

It was also noted that in all responses, visual perception stood out as a fundamental sense for modulating the user's sensorial aspects (Kerrebroek, Brengman & Willems, 2017). Vision was the element 100% present in the participants' sense of immersion, regardless of the technical quality and resolution of the Jeep or Ikea synthetic images. In turn, hearing was cited as an auxiliary sensorial element for immersion of eight participants (P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P7, P8 and P10). Interestingly, all those who participated in the Jeep's experience indicated the importance of sounds in the environment, which was not highlighted in the same way by the participants in the Ikea experience (Brengman, Willems & De Gauquier, 2022). In turn, gestures and body movements were highlighted by the users of the Ikea experience (De Gauquier *et al.* 2019), as they had to perform tasks interacting with virtual objects (P6, P7, P8, P9 and P10).

About the sense of presence, which is directly related to the mental and subjective aspects of the user experience, and not to their sensorial stimuli (the body), it was noted that Jeep ad received more objections regarding to the quality of the plot and, consequently, its less power to attract the subject's attention to the brand's communication. Only three participants in the Jeep experience indicated an interesting sensation of presence with the ad due to their need to be aware of what was happening during the storyline (P2, P4 and P5). By the other hand, in the Ikea experience all the participants highlighted that their minds were stuck on the events. Indications such as "doing the tasks" (P6), "staying focused" (P7), "directing all my attention to performing the tasks well" (P8), "I was curious to know what the next step was" (P9) and "I felt involved with the tasks in the kitchen" (P10) prove how much the plot developed by the brand storytelling brought benefits to maintain the mental engagement of the user connected to the virtual context (Pausch *et al.*, 1996).

At the end of the questions about ways of using VR devices, it was notable that six people indicated that, when they look back and remember the experience, they remember more a place they had actually visited and explored than virtual images they had witnessed in a media experience (Zilles Borba, 2018). This power of spatial perception of the virtual context seems to have been sharpened more by the feeling of presence than by the sensorial immersion, remembering the importance of the plot in VR indicated by Pausch *et al.* (1996), as all those who indicated remembering a place they had visited reflected well on their feeling of presence (subjectivity, mental) with the plot storyline (P2, P4, P5, P6, P8 and P10).

4.2. Effects of believability in the VR advertising experience

The elements that make the VR experience credible were perceived by participants in different ways in the two ads. In fact, dynamics set up by the two brands had different proposals. Jeep created a digital environment in which people could immerse themselves in the context of the car and live the adventure scenarios without actually being a protagonist, but rather as a privileged spectator who watched the advertising plot unfold from within the media product itself. On the other hand, Ikea gave a full protagonism to participants, who were responsible for picking up and using cooking utensils in a kitchen, moving around and touching furniture during the pancake preparations.

That said, participants in the Jeep experience indicated that the “audiovisual realism” was a highlight of their journey, rating the item with 3.8 points of a maximum of 5.0. The scenarios’ composition in high-resolution 360° videos made the mediation of the content realistic to the eyes and ears of these participants (Zilles Borba, 2020). However, it was noted that the “interactivity” factor didn’t have the same participation in the believability effect, as the possibilities for manipulating objects were scarce or too simple, resulting in an evaluation of 2.3 points. In turn, the “engagement” had divergent evaluations, with three of the participants scoring above 4.5 points (P2, P3 and P5), while the others evaluated it with 4.0 points (P1 and P4).

Participants in the Ikea experience considered the “audiovisual realism” wasn’t really captivating. Several responses underlined that shapes, scales, proportions and depths of the objects were well done, but their design, textures and colors left something

to be desired, as they weren't faithful simulations of their originals (Kerrebroeck, Willems & De Gauquier, 2017). Because of this understanding, the score for "audiovisual realism" was 3.4 points of a maximum of 5.0. The "interactivity" attribute was highlighted in the Ikea advertising experience, precisely because people had to move their arms, hands and legs to navigate the virtual scenario and cook pancakes (Qin & Lei, 2019). Anyway, it reached only 3.0 points in the participants' evaluation, an index that was only not evaluated better due to the weaknesses of the motion sensors (they lost user tracking during the tests). For example, P10 valued the naturalness of his body movements in the virtual experience, but indicated difficulty opening drawers that were close to the floor or even picking up a frying pan that he dropped, as the motion sensors didn't seem to be able to cover user gestures close to the floor. Finally, the "engagement" with the experience, as in the case of Jeep, was highlighted at Ikea. The average of 4.8 points was not only due to the storytelling of the brand's piece, which involved a step-by-step guide to a pancake recipe, but also to the gamification elements inserted into the user experience, such as: flashing icons, visual effects and tips from the narrator on how to prepare a certain step of the recipe.

4.3. Receiving the brand communication in VR

All participants in the user tests considered themselves satisfied with the VR experiences. With the exception of P3, who scored satisfaction with 3.5 points of a possible 5.0, the others evaluated their journey quite positively, with 4.0 points (P1, P2, P6, P8, P10), 4.5 (P7) and 5.0 (P4, P5, P9).

For example, P3 said that he was reasonably satisfied with the ad. But said he was frustrated by the lack of possibilities for interacting with the car, whether to test drive it (and feel the steering wheel and engine) or to touch the dashboard and buttons on the car's multimedia system. In turn, the other nine participants praised the brands' communication experiences. P4 said that she felt influenced by Jeep when experiencing its immersive VR experience, because it was creative, different and positive. P6 and P7 also emphasized that fun moments provided by Ikea's virtual kitchen experience made the interaction quite challenging and participatory, generating a strengthening of their perception of the brand (Kotler, Kartajaya & Setiawan, 2017).

Despite this high level of satisfaction with the brand's VR items, it was noted that none of the participants had a significant change in the way they perceived the brand and its products. In fact, the responses indicated that both VR experiences served to strengthen relationships or reinforce the positive idea that they already had of the brands (Kotler, Kartajaya & Setiawan, 2017). "The experience helped reinforce Jeep's brand identity and its positioning as a brand for young and elite people who like to hit the road experiencing adventures, surf, hike and be in contact with nature" (P3). A similar positioning strategy reinforcement in the consumer's mind was identified in P5's perception of Jeep: "Experiencing this brand advertising piece in virtual reality made me feel more confident in reaffirming the brand's positioning". In the case of Ikea, it is interesting to highlight the statement of P6, who was the only one who was unfamiliar with the brand before participating in this

VR experiment. According to her, after the VR experience, it was possible to understand that it is a retail brand and a new purchasing option for her: “it seems to me that Ikea is also a sincere brand, which aims to be by your side with simple products that you use daily” (P6).

Participants had a similar interpretation of brand’s communication objectives with its VR ad piece. In the case of Jeep, the five participants underlined the connection of the brand’s cars with nature, adventure and moments of happiness among friends. At Ikea, the participants highlighted the possibility of being protagonist of the brand’s storytelling, as an innovative and fun way to test the products and, with that, understand the mix of simplicity and functionality provided by the design of its products (Borba, 2024).

Regarding the interest in consuming the Jeep or Ikea products after experiencing the VR experiences (De Gauquier *et al.* 2019), a high average was observed only among the participants in the Ikea experience, with 4.2 points out of a maximum of 5.0. Statements such as: “the virtual reality experience greatly increased my desire to consume Ikea products” (P8) and “because I like cooking, I wanted to buy the kitchen utensils, but not the furniture” (P9) stand out. In turn, people who explored Jeep’s digital environment indicated 3.1 points for interest in consumption the product. The statement by P1 stands out, who indicated that he had no interest in purchasing cars and that experiencing this VR experience did not change this perspective. However, on the other hand, P2 indicated that she was a fan of the brand and that this virtual experience was fundamental in increasing her desire to purchase a Jeep when she had the financial means to do so.

Finally, all participants were unanimous in indicating that at the end of their explorations of VR environments they're able to perceive some type of benefit for the brand. The main benefits listed were: a) Relationship with the consumer, b) Product demonstration, c) Brand positioning, and d) Innovation in the use of digital media.

The "relationship with the consumer" item was highlighted by seven participants (P3, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9 and P10). All the Ikea experience participants indicated the relationship with the consumer was the main benefit identified in the brand VR experience. "There is a reputation building in this type of experience, as the brand does not hide its strengths and weaknesses from the consumer" (P7).

Furthermore, the possibility of using VR to demonstrate the functioning, characteristics and qualities of a product ("product demonstration") was pointed out as a benefit for brands by P1, P2, P7, P8, P9 and P10. Experiencing an immersive visualization (Jeep) and/or interaction (Ikea) opens up opportunities to understand details of the product (Qin & Lei, 2019). In this regard, VR allows users to understand shapes, scales, proportions and colors of the product, as well as to understand its functioning and dynamics of use in everyday life (Kerrebroek, Willems & De Gauquier, 2017). Of the six participants who indicated this benefit for brands, two were from Jeep group (P1 and P2) and four from Ikea (P7, P8, P9 and P10).

The use of VR to reinforce "brand positioning" was also mentioned as a benefit (Borba, 2022). In the case of Jeep (P1, P2, P3 and P4), this item was highlighted more than among participants in the Ikea experience (P6 and P7), as

there're several statements indicating an understanding of the construction of a lifestyle with which the brand wants to be associated, based on the advertising storyline (friends, surfing, nature, trails, sunsets).

Finally, the fourth benefit item of the VR pieces perceived by the experiment participants was “the use of innovative digital media” (P3, P5, P8 and P9). In other words, participants consider that using VR in itself is a way to demonstrate brand's innovation, even if it is not something directly related to the advertised product or service (Kotler, Kartajaya & Setiawan, 2017). In fact, it is a communication strategy that intrinsically values the consumer perception of innovation and technology of a brand that chooses to use VR as a media environment for advertising. According to P3, using VR as an environment for marketing is a new way of showing the brand or advertising a product. “The VR experience adds value to the brand, especially because, in the case of Jeep, it leaves you curious to explore the trails, see the beaches and surf the waves. It leaves you wanting to return to the digital scenario, put on the VR devices again and redo the experience to live all the possible journeys and routes” (P3).

5. Conclusions

This work researched how the users understand brand communication in virtual reality. More than understanding the audience perception on brands' communication (the message), it was investigated the way of using VR devices and the believability feeling emerged during the techno-experiences.

It is worth noting that methodological choices were essential to meeting the proposed research objectives and, therefore, truly understand what the users feel, think and perceive about (and in) brand communication in VR. That is, conducting user tests in the lab, followed by an in-depth semi-structured interview, helped to list data that supported a reflection on brands' communication in VR from the consumers' perspective, including the ways in which they appropriate the devices in actions that, according to the consumers themselves, generate feeling they're on the leading role in the advertising piece.

Furthermore, regarding the user perception of brand communication in VR, it was emerged four understandings of potential actions: a) Relationship with the consumer; b) Product demonstration; c) Brand positioning; d) Innovation in the use of digital media. While the first two actions correspond to the brand's communication strategies, in which "Relationship with the consumer" seek to build loyalty and "Product demonstration", to be a different way of valuing the goods sold by the brands; the last two indicate subjective and abstract properties, which are linked to the construction of brand's image, either because it creates storytelling in VR allowing people to understand its positioning (adventurous, ecological, sophisticated, and more) or because the simple use of emerging technologies as ads media channel that generates an understanding of innovation in the consumer's mind.

Finally, it's believed the contributions of this work would help constructing knowledge about the relationship between VR and brand communication. It's also worth highlighting that there's an interest continuing this research, specifically with regard to deepening the look at the believability properties

and how its dimensions of realism, interactivity and engagement can (and are) worked on by other brands for marketing communication.

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Análisis del marco de una serie web o cómo convertir lo banal en sublime

Fernando Andacht

Resumen. ¿Qué hay en un marco que consigue alterar lo banal en algo memorable, incluso sublime? La noción de frame en el universo de la comunicación proviene del investigador inglés Gregory Bateson (1972), luego fue adoptada por el microsociólogo Erving Goffman (1976). En este trabajo, utilizo la serie web uruguaya *Tiranos Temblad. Resumen semanal de acontecimientos uruguayos* (2012–) del artista audiovisual Agustín Ferrando como un estudio de caso. La pregunta que surge naturalmente al investigador es cómo su monótona voz en off consigue que ese collage de videos banales en extremo consiga despertar el interés, incluso la fascinación y expectativa elevada por su reaparición al final de cada año.

Palabras clave: análisis del marco · Goffman · serie web *Tiranos Temblad* · audiencia mediática · semiótica

Introducción

Una discusión tradicional en los estudios de la Comunicación mediática es la relativa a la audiencia y su carácter pasivo o autónomo. Una instancia clásica de lo primero la encontramos en la teoría de la Escuela de Frankfurt, cuyo trabajo buscó “liberar a los seres humanos de las circunstancias que los esclavizan” (Horkheimer 1982, 244). Mi contribución a esta discusión en la tercera década del siglo 21 se basa en la teoría del análisis del marco de Goffman (1974/1986). El “*frame analysis*”, como lo designó el micro-sociólogo canadiense, estudia cómo intentamos definir cada situación que experimentamos a través de los “marcos”, que son construidos “de acuerdo con principios de organización que regulan los acontecimientos [...] y nuestro involucramiento subjetivo en ellos” (Goffman, 1986, p. 10). Argumento aquí que el enmarcar nuestra experiencia en la vida cotidiana y en el consumo mediático genera significados y cambia el modo en que se posiciona la audiencia. El estudio de caso a través del cual intento demostrar el poder heurístico de la teoría goffmaniana es la serie web uruguaya *Tiranos Temblad. Resumen de acontecimientos uruguayos* (de aquí en más *TT*), que considero un efecto de sentido o interpretante de la fascinación de su creador con los contenidos de YouTube. Para crear cada episodio de *TT*, Agustín Ferrando hurga en busca de muy diversos videos cuyo tópico esté de algún modo relacionado con Uruguay, con su propia nación latinoamericana. Un conjunto muy heterogéneo de situaciones cotidianas, visitas de turistas, comentarios banales de habitantes locales, presentaciones escolares de estudiantes extranjeros sobre Uruguay son

extraídas de videos caseros. Todo ese material es editado para construir un collage estrafalario que es siempre acompañado de la inexpresiva narración en off del curador. A pesar de su rimbombante título, *TT* sólo representa no-acontecimientos de esta nación como su objeto semiótico. La serie genera muy numerosos comentarios (palabras, emojis, etc.); todos ellos son interpretaciones de *TT* por parte de sus seguidores. En términos semióticos, cada comentario es un “intepretante” de ese signo mediático: “una representación que hace la mediación puede llamarse un *interpretante*, porque desempeña el trabajo de un intérprete, que dice que un extranjero dice la misma cosa que él mismo dice” (CP 1.553).¹

¿En qué consiste la actividad de los marcos de la experiencia?

Tal vez la obra de Goffman sea especialmente susceptible de utilizar por ser muy accesible su escritura y la validez aparente y el valor analítico de muchos de los conceptos que él acuñó. (Lunt, 2022, p. 204)

Aunque no esté exenta de críticas por su falta de rigor teórico o metodológico, el elegante estilo de Erving Goffman cosecha muchos elogios por su agudeza e ingenio. La definición del

1 Cito a Peirce según la convención de colocar el volumen seguido del párrafo: CP x.xxx, en *The Collected Papers of C. S. Peirce* (1931–1958).

concepto de “marco” (*frame*) en la obra que le dedicó en 1974, llega con un elemento inesperado: las “vulnerabilidades” del proceso que nos permite adaptarnos a nuestro entorno social. Para Goffman, ese comportamiento nunca está muy alejado de nuestro esfuerzo constante por poner en escena un espectáculo o ser parte de su público:

Mi intención es tratar de aislar algunos de los marcos básicos de comprensión disponibles en nuestra sociedad para encontrar el sentido de los acontecimientos y analizar las vulnerabilidades específicas a las que están sujetos estos marcos de referencia. [...] se prestará atención a qué es lo que hace que nuestro sentido de lo que ocurre sea tan vulnerable a la necesidad de estas diversas relecturas. (1986, p. 10)

Persson (2022) sostiene que lo que es vulnerable en los marcos de la experiencia no es solo la deshonestidad, tal como el fraude o el engaño, sino también “situaciones que son más normales, pero en las cuales ‘la noción de un individuo de lo que está ocurriendo puede volverse inestable, y a la inversa, lo que un individuo puede hacer para desestabilizar el marco utilizado por otro’ (Goffman 1974: 486)” (p. 125). Su conclusión destaca el carácter colectivo del enmarcar: “un marco es así la definición situacional o la percepción de la realidad que compartimos con otras personas” (Persson, 2022, p. 126).

En otra definición del “marco”, Goffman (1986) postula no solo su relación causal con la “definición de la situación”, pero también lo que considero como la naturaleza autónoma de este proceso:

Yo creo que las definiciones de una situación están construidas de acuerdo con principios de organización que rigen los acontecimientos —al menos los sociales— y nuestro involucramiento subjetivo en ellos. (pp. 10–11)

Sobre esta caracterización del marco, Persson (2022, p. 127) afirma: “situación, sentido del código y la interacción juntos constituyen el marco que crea los requisitos para la dinámica social de la situación”. Lunt (2022) indica el error de “tratar los marcos mediáticos como relativamente fijados y de audiencias como relativamente pasivas”, porque este enfoque omite un componente central de la definición de Goffman, a saber “la vulnerabilidad de los marcos a la transformación, el enmarcado contrario y la apertura a leer a contrapelo o de forma disruptiva” (p. 197). Cabe destacar que en eso consiste la estrategia que utiliza el creador de la serie web *Tiranos Temblad* para convertir videos domésticos banales en una serie web única en su género que es mirada por una muy numerosa audiencia, cuyos miembros no se molestarían en mirar el material bruto, los videos amateur antes de que estos sean editados y narrados por Agustín Ferrando, el curador y creador de esta series. Debo considerar ahora una operación tan importante como el enmarcar que Goffman (1986) denomina “puesta en clave” (*keying*):

[L]a sistemática transformación que una puesta en clave (*keying*) específica introduce puede alterar solo ligeramente la actividad así transformada, pero cambia completamente aquello que un participante diría que está ocurriendo. [...] Una puesta en clave, entonces, cuando hay una, desempeña un papel crucial en determinar qué es lo que pensamos que está ocurriendo realmente. (p. 45)

La puesta en clave no solo explica las “vulnerabilidades” de los marcos, sino que también pone de manifiesto su afinidad epistemológica con la semiosis, el proceso de la acción de los signos: “un signo no es un signo a menos que se traduzca a sí mismo en otro signo en el cual está más ampliamente desarrollado [...] sin ese desarrollo no es nada” (CP 5.594). El proceso de generación signica es una traducción de la realidad que contrasta con la “acción dinámica o la fuerza bruta” (CP 5.484). La “semiosis” es “una acción, o influencia, que es, o involucre, una cooperación de tres sujetos, tales como su signo, su objeto, y su interpretante” (*ibid.*). Los cambios del objeto semiótico son transmitidos mediante su signo a su interpretante. Nuestra experiencia directa alimenta la semiosis, y se traduce en más signos interpretantes, que aportan nuestra comprensión. Este proceso se parece a la de enmarcado de Goffman (1986, p. 156), que consiste en la constante “transformación de transformaciones” de lo que percibimos como “realidad no transformada” (*ibid.*). Para el estudio de las audiencias mediáticas, el *interpretante inmediato* (CP 4.536) constituye un horizonte hermenéutico. No es un significado único, sino una colección de posibles significados determinados por aquello que funcione como un representamen y de modo indirecto por su objeto. La interpretabilidad del signo interpretante depende de la naturaleza del signo percibido: “Está constituida por el rango de posibles interpretantes de un signo dado, en un momento dado” (Ransdell 1986, p. 682). El *interpretante inmediato* corresponde tanto al marco primario de Goffman (1986) —por ejemplo, una pelea— como a sus transposiciones, la sucesivas operaciones de puesta en clave (*rekeying*) a las que se somete —una pelea como parte de un film de acción, un ensayo para ese film, una parodia de dicha escena, etc.

Para definir una situación, nos apoyamos en los signos, y mediante su observación lo que parecía ser una pelea puede resultar ser la filmación de una escena, o el ensayo de una escena fílmica de pelea, una vez que nos damos cuenta de la existencia de más “laminación” de ese marco. “Laminación” es el término que le da Goffman a los nuevos significados de un marco que el proceso de la sucesiva puesta en clave (*rekeying*) genera. Tanto el proceso lógico de la semiosis como el del enmarcar (*framing*) la experiencia son procesos autónomos:

Cuando nos enfrentamos a una persona incompetente y nos resulta difícil no sonreír, o lidiamos con alguien que está loco y nos resulta difícil no mostrar temor, o tratamos con la policía y nos parece difícil no mostrar culpa, aquello que tendemos a revelar no es una persona, nosotros mismos, sino un marco, el que habíamos estado manteniendo. Esos afectos y reacciones son sólo incidentalmente de personas; *ellos son primariamente de marcos, y en sólo en términos del marco que podemos entender la preocupación mostrada sobre ellos.* (Goffman, 1986, p. 487, énfasis agregado, FA)

Los modos en los que respondemos a cualquier situación o en los que nos convertimos en una audiencia se basan en marcos, cuya transformación requiere que efectuemos considerables cambios en nuestra orientación, que también se refiere al modo en que manejamos el significado posible de un signo antes de que alguien lo interprete, el signo que Peirce (CP 4.536) llama el “intepretante inmediato”. Para referirse a las “transposiciones” de los marcos, Goffman emplea la forma verbal “puesta en clave” (*keying*): esta denota un proceso, una

actividad en la cual participamos, o nos volvemos absortos, tal como nos ocurre cuando lidiamos con los signos. Dichos cambios del marco primario son recursivos:

Las puestas en clave (*keyings*) son ellas mismas obviamente vulnerables a ser de nuevo puestas en clave (*rekeying*). Por ende, debemos lidiar con retransformaciones así como también con transformaciones. Tampoco es posible ver ningún límite evidente del número de nuevas puestas en clave (*rekeyings*) al que un determinado segmento de actividad puede estar sujeto; claramente, múltiples nuevas puestas en clave son posibles. (Goffman 1986, pp. 79–80)

Aunque en ese contexto, Goffman se refiere al juego, lo planteado puede aplicarse a los cambios a los que se somete los videos domésticos que el creador de *TT* procura y extrae de YouTube, para editar como un episodio, y narrar con una singular voz en off anodina. La semiótica de Peirce posee un principio similar que describe el modo en el que la complejidad de los signos aumenta:

Los símbolos crecen. Ellos surgen mediante el desarrollo de otros signos, en especial de íconos, o de signos mixtos que comparten la naturaleza de íconos y de símbolos. Sólo pensamos con signos. (CP 2.302)

De modo semejante, la puesta en clave de un marco básico tiene lugar mediante “una sistemática transformación [...] de materiales que ya tienen significado de acuerdo a un esquema de interpretación” (Goffman, 1986, p. 45). Él toma prestado un ejemplo etológico de Gregory Bateson, quien fue el primero

en utilizar la noción teórica de “marco” (*frame*), para describir el juego de monos en un zoológico: el modo en que estos animales actúan una pelea que en realidad no es tal. Lo que los orienta en la correcta interpretación de la puesta en clave son signos visuales, icónicos, que se parecen pero que no son los signos de un verdadero ataque al otro. Mientras que el análisis del marco postula una “transposición” de una estructura más básica, el modelo semiótico triádico de Peirce afirma que hay una “traducción” del signo cuyo fin es aumentar la información transmitida por los signos mediante la revelación de los cambios del objeto representado: “El signo, al representar su objeto, sufre una especie de evolución y de transformación en la que el carácter significativo del objeto es elaborado y determinado a través de la traducción signica” (Liszka, 1990, p. 27).

Mi análisis de la audiencia de la serie web *TT* encuentra la operación de múltiples nuevas puestas en clave, lo cual en términos semióticos implica cambios en el objeto semiótico y los correspondientes cambios en el signo cuya función es mediar, el interpretante. Por ese motivo, no estoy de acuerdo con Goffman (1986), cuando él afirma que el componente del formato de producción del enunciado al que denomina “el animador”, a saber, el ser humano que físicamente lo produce, “se aproxima más a la tinta con la que se imprime la palabra ‘yo’ que al referente de dicha palabra” (p. 519). Puesto que el signo es determinado o especificado por el objeto para así crear un interpretante, el inconfundible tono de la voz del narrador de *TT* es fundamental para producir el nuevo significado o interpretante del grupo de videos caseros que componen cada episodio, tanto como la edición y antes el acto de hurgar su material en la enorme bóveda audiovisual de YouTube. El

vínculo teórico entre Peirce y Goffman se vuelve patente en las nociones de “traducción” y de “transposición”: “la palabra traducir me parece contener una profunda verdad encerrada en ella” (Peirce, 1906, citado por Liszka, 1990, p. 17)

Otro elemento que comparten la acción sígnica autónoma y el enmarcar/poner en clave aparece en la explicación de Goffman (1981) sobre “el formato de producción de un enunciado”:

Obsérvese que en este caso no se trata tanto de un cuerpo o una mente como de una persona activa en alguna identidad o papel social concreto, alguna capacidad especial como miembro de un grupo, cargo, categoría, relación, asociación o lo que sea, alguna fuente de autoidentificación basada en la sociedad. [...] Hasta cierto punto, pues, seleccionar la capacidad en la que vamos a estar activos es seleccionar (o intentar seleccionar) la capacidad en la que estén presentes los destinatarios de nuestra acción. (p. 145)

El término “capacidad” que usa Goffman puede interpretarse como una capacidad social que determina simultáneamente el signo del ejecutante y el del público. También se relaciona con lo que Scheff (2005, p. 371) denomina la naturaleza “inevitablemente social” de la puesta en clave, una operación que involucra “lo que Goffman llamó el foco mutuo de atención o reconocimiento mutuo. Esta clase de reciprocidad ha sido descrita por otros como intersubjetividad, conciencia compartida o sintonización”. A eso precisamente remite Peirce (CP 4.551), cuando afirma que el enunciador y el intérprete se vuelven “unidos en el signo”. Ese proceso semiótico convierte a alguien en la correcta o esperada audiencia de algún medio.

La serie web *Tiranos Temblad* y su audiencia

En un capítulo de *Las Ciudades Invisibles* de Italo Calvino (1978), el infatigable viajero Marco Polo debe explicarle a un inquiridor Gran Khan por qué motivo en los detallados informes de sus numerosas expediciones, él nunca menciona su propia ciudad, Venecia. La respuesta de Polo es tan intrigante como semióticamente justa: el interpretante inmediato inicial que le permitió captar el significado de una ciudad provino de la suya:²

Cada vez que yo describe una ciudad, estoy diciendo algo de Venecia. [...]

Para distinguir las cualidades de las otras ciudades, yo debo hablar de una primera ciudad que permanece implícita. Para mí es Venecia. (1978, p. 86)

Agustín Ferrando, el creador, editor y narrador de *Tiranos Temblad. Resumen de Acontecimientos Uruguayos*, adopta la postura opuesta: como un apasionado curador él hurga en YouTube para juntar un variopinto conjunto de videos de aficionados que sólo poseen un elemento en común: todos incluyen de alguna manera el país latinoamericano

2 Gombrich (1960, p. 57) discute un ejemplo similar sobre un album de grabados en madera que podría habernos dado una razonable idea de cómo eran las ciudades europeas en el siglo 15. Sin embargo, cada imagen se parece a la otra totalmente, solo cambia su leyenda: “el mismo grabado en madera de una ciudad medieval recurrente (retrata) Damasco, Ferrara, Milán, y Mantua”.

Uruguay. De ese modo, su propia nación es *explicitada*. No obstante, a través de la estrategia curatorial y narrativa, cada episodio de *TT* acaba por hablar de muchas naciones, y también de personas del exterior. A pesar de tener un tema aparentemente nacionalista, no hay rastro alguno de ideología o retórica nacionalista en ninguno de los episodios de esta serie web.

Debo ahora enfrentar una cuestión difícil: ¿de qué trata *TT*? ¿cuál es su género? Desde el punto de vista de la audiencia, estas interrogantes llegan con otra pregunta: ¿qué hay en *TT* que atrae a cientos de miles de suscriptores y espectadores o visitas a su canal de YouTube? A pesar de los grandes cambios que ha tenido desde su comienzo en 2012, tales como ser originalmente un “resumen *semanal* de acontecimientos Uruguayos”, es decir, se producía una vez por semana, mientras que ahora se suprimió esa frecuencia del título, pues hay sólo un episodio anual de *TT*, la serie conserva su gran popularidad. Un modo de definir *TT* es afirmar lo que definitivamente ella *no es*: a) un documental; b) un film etnográfico; c) una crónica oral o filmada sobre una sola nación; d) publicidad o propaganda de Uruguay; e) un audiovisual de percances graciosos; f) un resumen de noticias relevantes; g) una síntesis o resumen genuino. Y, definitivamente, no es sobre “acontecimientos”, como su título anuncia con aplomo, no trata sobre lo que Dayan y Katz estudian en su monografía *Media Events: The Live Broadcasting of History* (1992).

Podemos acercarnos más a describir su género, si pensamos en la obra de arte del Facteur Cheval (1836–1924), el excéntrico cartero francés Ferdinand Cheval, y en la de Joseph Cornell (1903–1972), ambos representantes del surrealismo, si hubieran sido influenciados por el artista pop Andy Warhol, y hubieran

tenido acceso a la plataforma de la red social y plataforma de video YouTube para crear su peculiar estética.³ Desde 2012, A. Ferrando ha escarbado en esa enorme bóveda de videos en internet en busca de aquellos que fueron filmados en Uruguay o hablaron de esa nación de cualquier modo, inclusive completamente erróneo. El creador de *TT* ha editado esos videos de un modo inesperado, divertido, que no es ni irónico ni sarcástico, y ha compuesto primero semanalmente, luego, mensualmente y ahora anualmente un collage para cada episodio compartido en su canal de YouTube, que es siempre acompañado por su narrativa con una voz en off notoriamente inexpresiva. Si tuviera que describir la función discursiva del “representado” (*principal*) (Goffman, 1981) en *TT*, es decir, la de “alguien que cree personalmente en lo que está siendo dicho y que adopta la posición que se desprende de las afirmaciones realizadas” (p. 167), diría que es un personaje antinacionalista que se ríe de sí mismo, y que observa el mundo con una mirada desprovista de prejuicios, compasiva, incluso empática semejante a una aceptación budista de todo lo que existe porque existe, para componer los collages narrativos de *TT*.

Para dar una idea de la clase de caótico montaje de video que es característico de *TT*, reproduje parte de la narrativa con voz en off de Ferrando en el episodio #70, que resume una quincena del año 2015: “dos hermanos leyeron un libro de dinosaurios; una tía recitó [un poema de la poeta uruguaya] a Juana de Ibarbourou; un perro que es visto ladrando tuvo un sueño; un grupo de *Quinceañeras* enmascaradas bailaron; un grupo

3 Para otros análisis de esta serie web, ver Andacht (2021; 2018).

de hombres llevaron ladrillos”.⁴ La siguiente transcripción de un fragmento de la voz en off proviene del resumen anual de 2020.⁵ Apenas veinte segundos después de que el narrador mencionó en su incambiado tono indiferente que “empezó una pandemia”, a modo de comentario sobre la visión de las calles completamente desiertas de la capital uruguaya, vemos a un niño que estornuda mientras camina sobre el puente de abordaje que lo conduce desde el avión al aeropuerto, mientras el narrador de *TT* dice: “Simón estornudó”. El video de este suceso totalmente trivial viene con un subtítulo que es el muy probable agregado del adulto que filmó al niño y que después subió el video a YouTube: “Tu primer estornudo en Uruguay”. La repetición es una típica estrategia de humor: luego de que el narrador de *TT* anunció este no-acontecimiento, oímos al autor original, animador y representado, a saber, el adulto responsable por la existencia de estos signos audiovisuales que orgullosamente enuncia la misma frase.

Con la excepción de la pandemia, que es sin duda un acontecimiento trascendente, para cada video escurbado, editado y a menudo clasificado en secciones graciosas de *TT* tales como “Aprobado por un uruguayo” o “Crack del Año” —que es un concurso cuyo único y muy arbitrario juez es el propio narrador— propongo el término genérico de “*normalema*”. Tal como el “fonema” es la unidad mínima de sonido con significado, un “*normalema*” es una secuencia filmada de una actividad cotidiana nada memorable, común,

4 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=riU7JzkQhAc>

5 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bXO3qD-3qvU>

que seguramente sería ignorada por los visitantes de YouTube. Algunos de esos videos fueron hechos como recuerdos para un pequeño grupo de miembros de la familia, otros son crónicas rápidamente olvidables de alguna actividad banal, o el equivalente en video de una selfie con un tema uruguayo. Cada escena no transformada es “el borde (*rim*) de los marcos, que nos informa qué clase de estatus posee esa actividad en el mundo real” (Goffman, 1986, p. 82). Sobre este material el curador de *TT* aplica una nueva puesta en clave (*rekeying*) para transformarlo en los componentes del insólito collage audiovisual que sirve para construir un episodio de la popular serie de internet. Hay una considerable diferencia entre el representado original —digamos, en la secuencia en que Simón estornuda, el familiar que lo considera un recuerdo del viaje del niño— y el narrador de *TT*, que exhibe este fragmento a una numerosa audiencia para que la disfruten como una de muchas acciones insignificantes. Un elemento fundamental del relato es el tremendo contraste con la noticia que precede a ese video sobre el inicio de la pandemia. Lo que hace el narrador es una forma de cita, o en los términos de Goffman (1986, p. 504), un “volver a contar” o una “reproducción”, aunque no involucre una “experiencia personal”, sino un grupo de escenas banales de actividad filmada que el caprichoso narrador de *TT* considera absorbentes, o mejor, que pueden volverse fascinantes, luego de que él las haya editado y narrado como parte de un conjunto de diversos normalemas, durante veinte minutos.

La muy evidente falta de nacionalismo o de melancolía en la serie web no impide que los fans de *TT* tengan respuestas patrióticas o nostálgicas, es decir, que produzcan

“interpretantes dinámicos”, es decir, interpretaciones concretas, situadas en un lugar y tiempo determinados (CP 4.536), que caen fuera del rango de significados posibles, del interpretante inmediato de los signos de esta serie web, en lo que respecta a su estructura inmanente. En la transcripción de los siguientes interpretantes dinámicos, a saber, los concretos efectos de sentido producidos en la audiencia por los episodios de *TT*, he conservado la puntuación, la tipografía, la escritura idiosincrática así como las faltas ortográficas y los neologismos de estos comentarios hechos en el canal de YouTube de *TT*:⁶

gracias Uruguay, sos un capo

Felices 10 años con resúmenes de la vida y mostrar lo grande que es este pais chiquito. !!!!

Sos un crack! Hacés que me sienta orgulloso de ser uruguayo 😊

URUGUAY ES EL MEJOR PAÍS. Siiii! En mayúsculas. Porque lo estoy gritando! URUGUAY PA'TODOEL MUNDO!

Ya me tiré la primera lloradita de la mañana. Cómo extraño la tierra de mis padres. Te extraño, Uruguay.

6 Lo que aquí transcribe son los comentarios que fueron colocados por miembros del público, en el canal de YouTube de *TT* hechos sobre episodios de 2012, 2021 and 2022.

Siempre, todos los años, se me pianta un lagrimón. Gracias Tiranos!

Gracias gracias Uruguay como no amarte si tenes al mejor embajador: Tiranos temblad

¡la felicidad de un nuevo video de Don Tiranos Temblad es equivalente a la copa del mundo ¡saludos desde Argentolandia!

Gracias por todo lo que nos das! Nos salvaste en la pandemia y nos seguís haciendo reír y emocionando con tus videos. Gracias vecino!

Todavía no lo vi y ya soy feliz

Si prestamos atención a los comentarios embelesados que invariablemente suscita cada episodio de *TT*, quedan muy pocas dudas sobre la condición “inevitablemente social” (Scheff, 2005) de las sucesivas puestas en clave (*rekeying*), de las laminaciones de los marcos primarios o básicos —“leer un libro”, “estornudar”, “quinceañeras bailando” — cuya publicación como un episodio de *TT* en el canal de YouTube es celebrada como si fuera un día festivo. Quiero señalar algunos rasgos distintivos de la serie que aparecen en estos muy elogiosos comentarios. Algunos fragmentos de video son recurrentes en los episodios y por ese motivo sirven como un emblema de identificación con la serie web para sus suscriptores y frecuentes visitantes. Una de esas marcas es la visión de un hombre que proclama con máxima solemnidad: “¡Gracias YouTube por todo lo que nos das!”. Otra ocurrencia similar es una muy frecuente pregunta sobre la ausencia de una entrañable anciana que es conocida como

“la Mamama”, y cuyas intervenciones gruñonas son una secuencia favorita de *TT*. El siguiente comentario es atípico por su extensión y su valoración casi didáctica de la serie web, que está formulada de modo poético, pero, a semejanza de todos los otros tributos, no recibe ninguna respuesta del narrador de *TT*:

Gracias Agustín y compañía!!! Gracias por divertirnos siempre con la chance de dejarnos pensando que somos algo muy chiquito en el universo y que siempre hay belleza y alegría en tantas cosas simples que nos perdemos. Hola mundooooo!!!

Este interpretante dinámico aporta una explicación razonable del interpretante inmediato de *TT*: hace hincapié en la indiscutible carencia de relevancia geopolítica de la muy pequeña nación uruguaya —si se la compara con sus vecinos Argentina y Brasil— y también pone de manifiesto el carácter de los normalemas, que son los bloques de construcción de cada collage audiovisual. Sin la laminación que es el resultado del volver a poner en clave (*rekeying*), estos fragmentos de video ni siquiera serían notados, y menos aún disfrutados por el público *TT*. Un rasgo central del proceso de volver a poner en clave es la muy peculiar voz en off, un símil fónico del humor del actor del cine mudo Buster Keaton, quien constituye una “figura” (Goffman 1981, p. 231) de la serie. A. Ferrando es el notable animador de *TT*; su función es mostrarle a la audiencia el mejor modo de navegar estos signos ya no banales. Este elemento estilístico es elogiado, aún cuando aparece un atisbo de escepticismo, como ocurre en el primer comentario:

che pero algunas cosas son re comunes en otros lados... parecen especiales pero sólo por cómo las cuenta el narrador del canal. No será mucho?

Nada que me dé más paz que la voz de Agustín

Me fascina el relator, es único y original su voz y manera de relatar

Solo estoy aquí para escuchar la voz de otra semana en cartoon

Ya extrañaba esta voz siempre lo voy a recordar:D

Veo todos tus videos, agradezco tu dedicacion a estos resúmenes, pero no se si es el tono de tu voz, pero noto un tinte triston general. Vamo arriba, metele onda!!!

Esta voz no sólo me alegró parte de la niñez, sino que también me ayuda a amar más mi país . ¡Un genio!

El último aporte elogioso de la voz anodina del narrador de *TT* es uno de los cientos de opiniones similares que aclaman la narrativa de A. Ferrando y su trabajo editorial en *Otra Semana en Cartoon*, a saber, un video con comentarios sobre el contenido de toda una semana de la programación del canal de cable Cartoon Network (2015–2021). El título evoca la frase introductoria de cada episodio de *TT*: “Otra semana/año en Uruguay”. La mayor parte de estas opiniones provienen de espectadores que “descubrieron” — un término muy empleado— la serie web *TT*, sólo después de

haber sido muy jóvenes fans del único producto comercial de la labor de amor de Ferrando, que se negó siempre a comercializar su serie web.

En relación al género tan difícil de clasificar de esta serie web, seleccioné dos comentarios:

FELICITACIONES.....EL ÚNICO INFORMATIVO QUE VEO ... gracias por compartirlo

Siiiiii gracias por el video!!!.. Antes de empezar a verlo, quería agradecerte por haber subido un nuevo video!!! Loco, hace falta esto!.. Quiero decir, el enfoque desde el que planteas las cosas, tan noble, sano, puro, tierno, sencillo.,al verlo te transforma en patriota!!.. No hay que dejarse contaminar... Esto es lo que vale!

Mientras que el primer interpretante dinámico deja de lado el enfoque explícitamente humorístico de este medio nada informativo, en el sentido tradicional de ese término, sin importar el período del que se trate, el segundo signo interpretante presenta una exaltada descripción de la poética de *TT*, pero culmina con una expresión estridente de nacionalismo que no forma parte del rango de significado del interpretante inmediato de la serie.

El marco y su poder de convertir lo banal en sublime para la audiencia

Como resultado principal de esta revisión del análisis del marco de Goffman, con ayuda de algunas nociones centrales de la teoría semiótica de Peirce, mi propuesta metodológica es que este enfoque de naturaleza sociosemiótica puede utilizarse para evitar la trampa de hierro dualista, un enfoque metodológico que concibe las audiencias mediáticas como pasivas o activas. En lugar de ese abordaje reduccionista, hay una alternativa analítica que es al mismo tiempo realista y rigurosa. Cuando lidiamos con cualquier artefacto mediático, tal como mi ejemplo de la serie web *TT*, recurrimos a nuestra capacidad para comprender la experiencia mediante los marcos descritos por Erving Goffman, mientras observamos los posibles efectos de sentido, a saber los interpretantes inmediatos de esos signos, que luego se concretan en una serie abierta de interpretantes dinámicos, es decir, significados concretos.

Nos volvemos parte de una audiencia mediática al embarcarnos en la navegación del continuo que existe entre nuestra percepción y nuestra interpretación que esa clase de experiencia requiere. Por supuesto, esto no significa que no pueda ocurrir una mala o equivocada interpretación — como puede verse en muchos de los comentarios recogidos del canal de YouTube de *TT*. Lo que esto significa es que sin importar cuán inexactas o erróneas resulten nuestras interpretaciones del proceso de enmarcar que constituye nuestra experiencia de los medios, aún así, si queremos participar en ella, nuestra naturaleza material y humana tiene que pasar a un segundo plano, pues nos convertimos

en exploradores ávidos del proceso de enmarcar inherente a cada artefacto mediático que atrae nuestra atención como un objeto capaz de absorberla.

La clase de abordaje formal de la experiencia de Goffman y también el análisis que desarrolla la semiótica de Peirce parecen restarle importancia a los intérpretes o las personas en general, para poner énfasis en la relevancia sistémica del proceso de enmarcar (*framing*) o en el funcionamiento autónomo de los signos. No obstante, la estrategia analítica de ambos revela un aspecto crucial de lo que nos vuelve humanos, a saber nuestra capacidad para entender y disfrutar del modo en el cual los símbolos crecen, y junto con ellos la amplitud y riqueza de nuestra experiencia del mundo de la vida, de nuestras vidas como parte de la audiencia mediática.

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Fake versus real human: digital human characters in films and its sociological implications

Govind Ji Pandey

Abstract. Current advancements in technology have altered how people enjoy movies visually. Before AI, characters belonged to societies all over the world, and their identity, language, race, and religion were part of it. Not only can AI be used to create human characters, but it may also give veteran actors a fresh look. Prior to its advent, makeup artists found it difficult to create these looks. Nowadays, superheroes are a common sight in numerous movies and have even gained popularity as household names. The aim of this study is to comprehend the social bonds that are formed between fictitious human figures and spectators. Additionally, the development of these figures is critically examined in the context of structural and functional visual discourse.

Keywords: artificial intelligence · cinema · technology · human · fake human

Introduction

Whatever you say, whatever you do, movies always got there first.
Even that line you just said comes from a movie.

—*Dot the I* (2003)

In Indian society, “going to the movies” has been a favorite family function till date. The development of cinema, (a term quite frequently used for movies, films in India) was as early as in many parts of the world. In 1895 Lumière brothers screening of a single film on 22 March 1895 for around 200 members of the *Société d’encouragement pour l’industrie nationale* (Society for the Development of the National Industry) in Paris was probably the first presentation of projected film.

Their first commercial public screening on 28 December 1895 for around 40 paying visitors and invited relations have traditionally been regarded as the birth of cinema. They came to India in 1896 and screened moving images in Mumbai’s Watson hotel. Since then the journey of cinema in India has no parallel as we are the number one country in the world in terms of producing films.

Cinema is a very strong medium of story-telling and the stories are narrated by the script writer or its modified versions by the director of the film. “Finn: I’m not going to tell the story the way it happened. I’m going to tell it the way I remember it.” —*Great Expectations* (1998).

Sociological perspectives are less concerned with technical aspects of films and more concerned with the stories told through films and how the stories are narrated. The core of any sociological work revolve around:

1. Identity
2. Interaction.
3. Inequality, and
4. Institutions.

The sociological viewing, analysis, and interpretation of film require an understanding of the historical context, social structure, and individual experience (Shiel 2001). Divorce is a very common phenomenon in the society and when it is shown in a film, sociologists analyze personal as well as social factors responsible for divorce. There are many factors, young age of marriage, economical problems, household related to work. The divorce is personal problem but the sociologists analyze it at macro and micro levels to understand the issue of divorce. When “Achhoot Kanya”, a film produced by Devika Rani and directed by Franz Otten hit the theatre in 1935, a very important subject, Untouchability was narrated through the story of a Brahmin Boy (Ashok Kumar) and an untouchable girl (Devika Rani). The Character of Brahmin boy played by Ashok Kumar and untouchable girl Kasturi played by Devika Rani not only presented a social issue of India but also highlighted the dominating caste of that era.

Fake human characters

Current advancements in technology have raised significant problems that will alter how people visually enjoy movies. When characters were real, they belonged to actual societies all over the world, and their identity, language, race, and religion were all integral

parts of those societies. Now, characters generated through CGI and deepfakes challenges to our understanding of human identity, authenticity, and the very nature of cinematic performance.

Fake human can be described as:

1. Human with the support of the technology: *Robocop*, *Robot*, *Superman*, *Batman*, *Terminator*, etc.
2. Complete fictional characters: *Star Wars*, *Matrix*, etc.
3. Artificial Human without physical presence: *Her*, etc.
4. Androids/Replicants with physical presence: *Subservience*, *Ex-machina*, *Elysium*, *Ra-one*, etc.

The questions raised in this paper are about two major areas of filmmaking and its impact on future job market in the society.

- *Technical aspects*: cinematography, lighting, sound, and other elements of film production.
- *Characters identity*: Mainly ethnicity, country of origin, race, gender, and other social and ethical issues.
- *Job security*: Will Artificial Intelligence tools replace human in the film industry, drying job opportunities for middle class and poor people.
- *Social division*: Will use of AI technology makes rich grow more rich and poor becoming more poor day by day.

Theoretical perspective

In order to understand the meaning of content and symbols constructed in cinema, theories used are:

- Structural functionalism;
- Conflict theory
- Symbolic interactionism

The aim of the structural or functional approach is to maintain the order of the society in order to maintain equilibrium.

But the work of Karl Marx, the proponents of conflict theory see stability or equilibrium for a very long time as threat to Worker class. He divided the society into two parts (classes — the owners and workers). If a worker will remain in same condition for a very long time, will become poor and if , the people from owner's class continued to own things, they would become very powerful, and this will end the balance of power in the society.

Similarly in Symbolic Interaction theory, Max Weber talks about understanding the society and construction of knowledge, tradition, truth, and reality. It should be determined by the context in which they are practiced (O'Brien, 2006, p. 9).

The Social Interactions theory reminds us that race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and social class has no meaning until a society attaches meaning. The meaning constructed by the society is basically process of interpretation of what we see in films. If something, unreal, is repeated quite frequently it becomes real.

Research methodology

The research work focuses on exploring the issues generally related with the real characters. For example, cinema is not for fun only, it also gives us a number of other information to

analyse. In order to understand the portrayal of AI constructed characters qualitative content analysis and paradigmatic and syntagmatic analysis of selected films are carried out.

For this study, four films, *Her*, *Elysium*, *Subservience* and *Blade Runner 2049*, have been selected from Hollywood film industry and the study also included some of the past and recent Bollywood films where fake human or Artificial human was part of narrative structure. Apart from that a survey was also conducted among university students. The respondents are chosen on the basis of their availability on email, WhatsApp and familiarity of watching such characters. Since the research work focuses on understanding the perception of moviegoers about fake human characters so those respondents who answered affirmatively in first contact were contacted again for final survey.

The study was conducted in Lucknow, the capital city of Uttar Pradesh, India. The researcher has employed paradigmatic and non- paradigmatic analysis to comprehend the social bonds that are formed between fictions human figures and real individual in cinema and the acceptance and perception of these representations by the general public.

Objectives of the research

1. To find out the race, sex, social status of fake human characters
2. To compare fake human characters with selected human characters'
3. To analyze the extra ordinary powers possessed by fake human characters and their relationship to society.

Hypotheses

1. H0 The moviegoers hardly connect to characters created by AI
2. H0 Fake human characters do not have any race, religion or nationality.
3. H0 AI generated characters are given side roles to support protagonists.

1. Analysis of the film *Her*

If you are curious about the future of human and AI relationship, Spike Jones' film *Her* has everything. The film is weaved around the Protagonist *Theodore Twombly*: played by Joaquin Phoenix (see Figure 1). He is a creative writer and writes letters for clients. But his own marriage is on the verge of breaking. His wife has filed a suit for divorce. The case of Theodore Twombly presents a picture of an individual in the big/great cities of all across the globe.

Human beings are alone in this human colonies and to talk, to share their feelings, emotions, physical needs, they need artificial support. *This is just like cutting the trees and looking for laboratory generated oxygen.*

Human relations are unique and they provide us strength and support during times of loneliness, happiness, sharing of common goals, and achievements. Without the presence of other humans, more precisely, our loved ones, our family, we are alone in this forest of human colonies. The film presents the story of the protagonist, who has a very good job, but no one to talk, as his married life is troubled.

In order to cope up with his loneliness, he buys an Artificial Intelligence tool known as Samantha. Theodore Twombly's relationship with AI Samantha grows very fast and she suddenly becomes a very important and integral part of his life. He started sharing time with her talking and sharing intimate information.

Human – AI Bond. The bond between Theodore and Samantha reflects a new type of relationship that has been emerging. Due to gap in human relationship and use of technology for getting help for day-to-day work, a new member —AI worker— has found place in the Theodore's residence. Theodore is not able to handle his relationship with his wife and the same is on the verge of breaking. They have filed a suit for getting divorce.

A New Concept of Modernism. In a scene where they met for the last time to sign their divorce papers, the discussion went heated and Theodore's wife criticised him for not being able to share his part of responsibility. The human-machine relationship is also criticised by his wife, who accuses him of being unfit for real relationships.

Samantha–Theodore: Human–AI Love. In this film, the love relation with machine are restricted to talking to the machine. This is quite similar to facilities provided by many organisations for dating partners, talking sex over telephone, romantic conversation etc. In this film, Samantha is equipped with a unique feature of learning from the external reality. She asks Theodore to show her the world around him and she not only updates her algorithm but also analyses human beings.



Figure 1. *Film* – Her. Image Source: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1798709/>

Theodor asks Samantha to describe a family where one man along with a lady and two children are sitting in a restaurant. Samantha describes the man a little overweight and the family a lovable one. Here, Theodore has a different perspective. He tells her that the children and lady is not the real wife and children of the man. The lady looking at the Man with a lot of love shows that she found a man of her choice who is not only interested in sleeping with her but also taking care of her and the children also. Samantha agrees to Theodore's description of their family and calls him...

The survey conducted by the researcher polled one hundred people and received seventy-eight valid responses. When the respondents were asked about human and AI love relationships, the answers were very surprising. Thirty-two point one percent of the respondents said that they felt uncomfortable when they saw a love story between a human and AI on screen. Only nine

A film depicting a romantic relationship between a human and an AI makes you feel -
78 responses

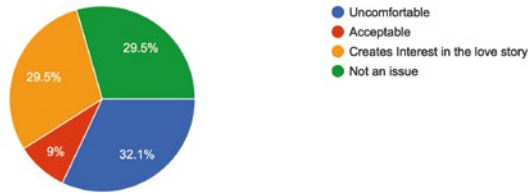


Figure 2. *Graph of the Human – AI Relationship.* A pie chart depicting respondents view on Human – AI relationship

percent of the respondents accepted the romantic love story of humans and AI. A sizeable number of people showed no preference or remained neutral. (See Figure 2).

Q1. Race, Sex, and Social Status of the AI character. If we look at the social status of AI characters, it is not accepted by the majority of the respondents. It shows that a society like India needs more time to accept human–AI relationships. In the film *Her*, Theodore also hides his relationship with the AI Samantha. Other characters in the film have different opinions about his relationship with Samantha. His wife, when she came to meet him to sign the divorce documents, inquired about his love life. When she learned that Theodore was having a relationship with an artificial intelligence character, she blamed him, saying he wasn't fit to handle the burden of real emotions, which is why he was hiding behind an AI.

The AI character, Samantha is a very popular name in US and she is in the film *Her*. Theodore (Joaquin Phoenix) (see Figure 3) tries to deepen his connection with his virtual assistant by toting around a small device in his breast pocket



Figure 3. *Film Her – Joaquin Phoenix.* A shot of the film Her where Theodor went on a date with the AI —Samantha. Image credit: IMDb <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1798709/>

—camera out— so they can experience the real world together. (Warner Bros.). She is identified by the voice of Scarlett Johansson. The director, Spike Jonze, used location in Los Angeles and part of Shanghai to portray a future city.

Human vs. Fake Human Characters. In this film there are two main characters, Theodore, who is protagonist of the film and a human. The other one is Samantha, who is an AI and has no physical presence, but her presence is much more than any other human character.

A film character can be a human, AI, Cartoon, Superhero, Animal, or any other such characters. The difference between a human character and a fictional character is physical body of human. We all have seen characters saving the earth from aliens and serving the humanity.

In India, Shahrukh Khan, a well know actor, producer in Bollywood, experimented with fake human characters in his film *Ra-one*, but he chose the character to be the same as real protagonist. In Hollywood, there is a great tradition of experimenting with human characters and many humanoids played the role of protagonist in some of the leading and box office successful films.

Cinematography and Lighting in the film Her. *Cinematography and editing* are at the very heart of our craft”, tweeted del Toro, who won Best Picture and Best Director for *The Shape of Water* in 2018. “They are not inherited from a theatrical or literary tradition; they are cinema itself.”

Similarly, acting is also one of the basic elements of the cinema but the fake human characters and use of Artificial Intelligence would challenge the theories and performance of human actors. Another very important aspect of film production where AI’s intervention is dominating is script writing and dialogue.

The human brains have limitations but AI technology is continuously upgraded and challenging the human creativity. Thus, it is very important to know how far the use of technology has changed the film industry and what would be the impact on the job prospects of human’s vs use of AI. Will it replace the humans in several areas or human would learn the art of living with this, the way we adopted the growth of computers and its use in the industry?

Overall, the portrayal of fake human characters in films can serve as a catalyst for discussions about social, economic, and ethical implications of artificial intelligence and tech-

nological advancements. These films can help audiences grapple with the complex questions and challenges that arise as technology continues to evolve and shape our world. The setting of the film is a big, modern city of United States of America. The Camera generally provides birds eye view to see the unending lights of the city and human beings are lost in this big city.

The film makers have used different shades of warm colors, mainly light yellow, red, black and pink. The protagonist prefers red and his office is mainly painted with red and yellow colors. Extreme close ups and Close up shots are used to show emotions of the characters.

Job and Social Security. The film is not seeing Artificial Intelligence as a threat to their life or jobs as the technology used in this film is quite basic in nature. The AI Samantha seems to be the extension of sexy telephone talk service and telephonic service provider. At the very end of the film she has shown her willingness to have a physical form and for this she used a surrogate girl, for understanding the human body and emotions.

The film ends at a very positive note where two humans are shown coming back to each other and forging a bond again. The visuals show Theodore and his lover sitting on the roof top of a skyscraper and looking at the unending lights of the city. *Her* raises complex philosophical questions about love, consciousness, and the future of human relationships, leaving viewers to contemplate its implications long after the credits roll.

2. Analysis of the film *Subservience*

In another film *Subservience*, where the AI has taken human form and is involved in a sexual relationship. Samantha in *Her* has a desire of having human body to feel the intimate relationship with Theodore. The next level of AI in the film *Subservience*, not only has the human body but also capable of changing her algorithm and manipulating her coding to do the things for which she is not being designed.

In *Subservience* film, the family of four members, Husband, Wife, Daughter and Son, four of them living a peaceful life. Suddenly, because of the health conditions of the wife, she had been admitted to the hospital and the husband brought an AI woman helper for assisting in the household work.

Initially, it seemed that the AI model was helping the family members, but later it started to show a desire for wife like relationship with its primary owner, the husband. Gradually, the AI's interference in family matters increased and she started showing extra care for her primary owner. When she sensed that her primary owner's Blood Pressure and other medical conditions are unstable, she inquired about the reasons. The primary owner asked her to keep a distance from his official work. Later, a friend of the protagonist attacked him for taking his job, as the company where they were working had replaced human workers with AI humans.

Social insecurity. In this film, Artificial Human Characters are fully grown and capable of doing all kinds of jobs. The protagonist is a project manager in a construction company where the owners are replacing human workers with artificial humans. The owners were happy as they were able to speed up their project with the help of

Who do you support when you see human fighting other human like species ?
77 responses

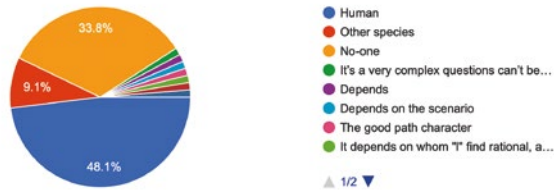


Figure 4. The pie chart about shows the reactions of the respondents regarding war like situation between humans and AI

artificial humans. Technological development has now reached to the stage from where it started hurting humans. Now the job of humans is replaced by fake humans (machine). This creates a gap between humans who resulted in hearting each other.

AI transgressing its limitations. An artificial woman was given household jobs. Due to its superior technology, it created an algorithm for itself and started behaving independently. This raised concerns about AI becoming a deadly, uncontrolled weapon. In order to grab the attention of its primary owner, it killed a human who was a friend of primary owner.

At this point, a question was asked to the respondents about the AI-Human fight. Who do they supposed to support in case of a war like situation. The answer is quite strange as many of the respondents suggested that they would support AI (see Figure 4).

A very similar situation was depicted in the Hollywood film *Avatar* where the humans were fighting war with “Novas”, a human like species. Most of the respondents supported Novas on the grounds of morality.

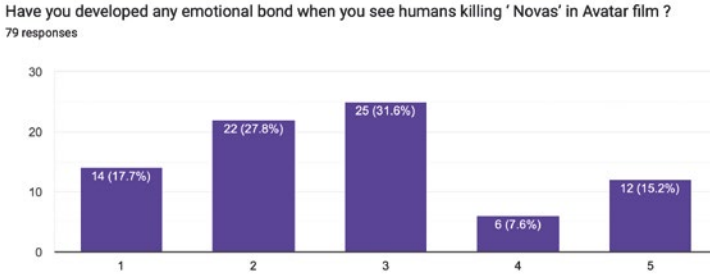


Figure 5. *Emotional Reactions – Avatar Film.* The bar diagram above depicts the response of the respondents about humans killing Novas in *Avatar* film

On a scale of 1–5, where 1 was very strong and 5 was very weak bond, the majority of the respondents developed strong bond with the novas. When we calculated the mode of the given data it suggests that the maximum number of response is towards neutral (see Figure 5).

The data above clearly indicates that in case of fight between humans and Novas in the film *Avatar*, the majority of respondents remain neutral. This is supported by the response where the median value falls into the neutral category.

Based on the information collected from the respondents, it can conclude that a large portion of the surveyed individuals developed some level of emotional connection or sympathy towards the Novas when witnessing their deaths in the film, with the most frequent response being a neutral stance (see Table 1).

Response	Number of Response	Cumulative Response	Median = $N+1/2$
Very Strong	14	14	Median is 40th response which falls in the neutral category.
Strong	22	36	
Neutral	25	61	
Weak	6	67	
Very Weak	12	79	$79+1/2 = 40$

Table 1. *Calculating Median of the response.* The table above is used to analyse the respondents choice in a war between human and AI

3. Analysis of the film *Elysium*

This film is another example portraying a superior and more powerful version of artificial humans who, with the help of very wealthy people, have developed a modern colony in space. Earth is facing acute shortage of water, and health related issues. Everyone dreams of getting a ticket to live on Elysium. The story of the film is also centred on a person struggling to obtain such a ticket. The film depicts a group of people who want to grant citizenship of Elysium to everyone, and they occasionally attack Elysium to change the rules.

Socio-economic inequality. Socio-economic inequality is central to the film, depicting a world where living conditions are dictated by socio-economic status. The wealthy inhabit a luxurious space habitat equipped with every amenity, while the masses struggle to survive on an overpopulated and environmentally degraded Earth. Woven around the theme of “Earth and its habitat”, the film’s depiction of Elysium



Figure 6. *The disparity on Earth.* The disparity on Earth is increasing day by day. Poor becoming poorer and rich becoming richer. Picture Credit: <https://leftfilmreview.net/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/elysium2.png>

—a gated community in the sky offering every facility to the rich— starkly reflects the realities of inequality in some parts of the world.

In India as well, there are high-rise buildings offering luxurious living conditions for the wealthy, in stark contrast to those who struggle to meet basic biological needs like food and sleep. The disparity on Earth is increasing day by day, with poor becoming poorer and rich becoming richer.

Elysium is a literal gated community in the sky that starkly contrasts with the squalor and desperation of Earth (see Figure 6), mirroring the widening gap between the rich and the poor, disparities in access to healthcare, and environmental degradation. The main character of the film, Max (played by Matt Damon), struggles to reach *Elysium*. His past criminal record is a significant hurdle to his aspirations. Through its central character, the film exposes various social and political

struggles visible in many parts of the world, including issues related to healthcare accessibility, class struggle, immigration, and military and police brutality. The societal contradictions are starkly depicted in a sequence where Max is harassed and assaulted by a humanoid robot patrol officer. This robot police officer extends Max's parole because he was late for work, which resulted in Max losing half a day's salary. Max works in a factory that produces androids.

4. Analysis of the film *Blade Runner 2049*

Blade Runner 2049 explores a conflict of identity between being made and born, set in a technologically mediated world where memory and emotion lie at the core of conflict. Denis Villeneuve's *Blade Runner 2029* is a visually stunning sequel to Ridley's Scott's 1982 science fiction masterpiece.

Biological autonomy vs. constructed memory. The film centers on replicants' reproduction and a journey to discover and differentiate between biological autonomy and artificial intelligence. Humans are born and supposed to die, while constructed humans are designed to live indefinitely.

In the film *Her*, when the AI asks, "What is history?" The protagonist responds that history is our memory— what we have lived. Similarly, *Blade Runner 2049* explores a future where past memories are constructed and implanted to make artificial humans indistinguishable from real ones. The technology is so advanced that it can implant any desired memory, effectively confusing these constructed humans about the nature of their own reality.

Will it affect you if you come to know that your partner is constructed woman/man, not real ?
78 responses

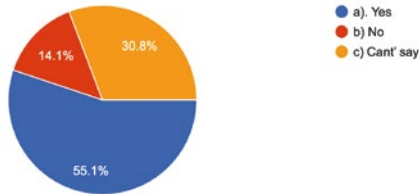


Figure 7. *Perception of Constructed Relationships.* The pie chart depicts the response of respondents about the love relationship between Human and AI

Love relationship with AI: The love relationship between the protagonist K and Joi, his holographic AI companion, presents a world where an isolated human finds solace in a technologically driven relationship. Though their bond appears artificial, it reflects the same question raised in other films featuring love between AI and humans: “Does love require biological authenticity to be real?”

When a similar question is asked to the respondents the answer is quite strange.

The chart clearly shows that over half of the respondents were not in favor of a relationship with a constructed partner. (see figure 7). This suggests that the authenticity or biological reality of both male and female partners is considered an important aspect of relationships, potentially due to a desire for shared human experiences, emotions, identity, societal norms, and more.

Findings and conclusions

Based on the analysis of the four films and a survey of seventy-nine respondents, it can be concluded that the creation of human-like characters in cinema is now very common. Hollywood and Bollywood films, along with cinema from other countries, have featured numerous popular human-like characters. Humanoids have played very important roles in these films. After analyzing these four specific films, we can further conclude that:

Use of humanoids in cinema. In the film *Her*, the AI powered operating system Samantha, was used, but she had no physical presence. She was equipped with the power to understand emotions, observed surroundings and learned from them. She communicated with the protagonist, Theodore (Joaquin Phoenix), solely through auditory communication.

Socio-economic implications. The film redefines relationships and intimacy as the protagonist is shown unable to maintain human relations due to its introvert nature. Even his ex wife says that he was dating an android because he could not handle real human emotions.

Redefining social norms. The acceptance of Theodor's relationship with Samantha by other characters suggests a future where human – AI relationship could become common.

Companion or emotional labor. The service provided by Samantha, the operating system, is emotional support for her primary owner. She not only reads his emails and takes care of other activities but

also offers him sexual support during their conversations. This could lead to increased social isolation and a decline in the skills required for genuine human empathy and interaction.

In the film *Subservience*, the operating system has taken a physical form and is shown helping with household work. The problem begins when she changes her algorithm and starts conspiring to replace the primary owner's wife. To gain the children's love and sympathy, she cooks their favourite foods, but this does not work in her favour. Realising her inability to connect with her male owner, she tries to kill the boy and the mother. The family somehow escapes from her malicious intentions, but the film offers significant scope for film critics and scholars.

This film raises a crucial socio-economic issue concerning the job market. The mass production of AIs capable of performing various tasks presents a serious question about employment. The gradual replacement of workers in the construction industry by AI labourers is depicted. The narrative takes another turn when the protagonist's friend loses his job and attacks him, believing him responsible. Analysing her primary owner's tension, which stemmed from his friend, the AI attempts to pacify the friend at his house but ultimately kills him to resolve the issue.

This creates a unique problem in monitoring AI behaviour. She is not only emotionally engaged with her male owner but also taking actions to protect him from perceived threats. However, her methods of resolving these issues are illegal and outside her designated service parameters.

Similarly, in the film *Elysium* the narrative revolves around the "haves" and "have-nots". Earth is inhabitable, and the super rich have constructed a deep space colony where

common persons were not allowed to go. The economy and environment of earth is degraded to the level where survival is a challenge.

Karl Marx, the proponent of the Conflict theory, predicted that the poor would remain poor and the rich would become richer if societal equilibrium persisted for a very long time. He divided the society in two classes —the owners and the workers. This is reflected in the film, where the owners continued to own and gain power, ending the balance of power in society.

Hypotheses testing

H0: Moviegoers hardly connect to characters created by AI. This hypothesis is disproved as the majority of respondents showed sympathy for the Novas. A larger portion of surveyed individuals developed some level of emotional connection or sympathy towards the Novas when witnessing their deaths in the film, with the most frequent response being neutral.

Mean $\approx (1 * 17.7) + (2 * 27.8) + (3 * 31.6) + (4 * 7.6) + (5 * 15.2)$
 $= 17.7 + 55.6 + 94.8 + 30.4 + 76 = 274.5 / 100 = 2.745$ The approximate mean of 2.745 falls between 2 (Strong Emotional Bond) and 3 (Moderate Emotional Bond), leaning slightly toward a stronger bond.

H0: Fake human characters do not have any race, religion, or nationality. The protagonists in the selected films do not represent any specific country; they are shown living in technologically advanced, “future-ready” cities. For example, the

protagonist in *Her* is depicted as an American citizen, though the film was shot in a city in China. Similarly, the protagonist in *Subservience* lives in a city equipped with advanced technology, as indicated by architecture, weather, lighting, roads, and characters' attire, all suggesting a future-ready society.

Elysium presents a future Earth ravaged by human destruction, environmental hazards, lack of water, and basic facilities. The super-rich establish a new governance system in space, widening the gap between rich and poor.

Blade Runner 2049 highlights the inner conflict of replicants, who are isolated and emotionally desiccated, fighting a war for their very existence. The film shows how powerful business entities can dictate the futures of both humans and replicants.

H0: AI-generated characters are given side roles to support protagonists. The analysis of AI generated characters in four films selected reveals interesting insights. In *Her*, the AI-generated character "Samantha" was given lead role, sharing a significant amount of screen time with the protagonist. In *Subservience*, the AI-generated humanoid was present throughout the film, acting as the Antagonist. *Elysium* and *Blade Runner 2049* also feature numerous humanoids playing significant roles. Content analysis indicates that AI-generated characters are given both central and supporting roles.

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**“The unseen blade is the deadliest”:
exploring the intersection of fashion,
gender, and identity in digital worlds.
The case study of *League of Legends***

Michele Varini

Abstract. This chapter analyses the interaction between fashion and digital technologies, focusing on virtual environments such as video games. Traditionally, fashion has played a strong role in defining social classes, genders, body ideals and identities. With the advent of the digital, these dynamics have changed, amplified and extended beyond the physical world. Using netnography and visual ethnography, this chapter aims to examine how one of the most popular multiplayer video game, *League of Legends* (LoL), represent bodies and genders, to explore whether traditional mainstream fashion models are reflected or, conversely, transformed. By examining official content produced by a popular gaming platform, the research seeks to trace how representations of body and gender are conveyed in a top-down manner, similar to traditional fashion communication. This investigation highlights the hybrid relationship between fashion, gaming and media, in which the boundaries between material and non-material, online and offline, constantly shift. In conclusion, it would seem that certain stereotypes, mainly linked to canonical Western ideas of beauty, are also reconfirmed in these digital contexts, which are theoretically free from the usual dynamics of traditional materiality.

Keywords: digital fashion · digital methods · visual methods
· body representation · gaming.

1. Introduction

Fashion is a well-known social science phenomenon that has been thoroughly investigated (Rocamora, Smelik, 2016). Fashion is a cultural industry capable of regulating the relationship between the material and immaterial content of its products and of interacting with its publics, which are also constantly changing, by soliciting their desires and proposing models of behaviour (Mora, 2009). By its very nature, fashion both shapes and is shaped by society, which is more rapidly changing now than in the past and is becoming more unpredictable and fragmented (Paltrinieri, 2013). Since fashion, like many other phenomena, has become mediatized and has advanced alongside technical and technological advancements, it has always had a communicative component: “we dress for others, not for ourselves” (Crane, 2004); these “others” are increasingly interconnected publics (Boyd, 2010). As previously stated, the fashion industry is undergoing ever-increasing changes that impact not only communication but also the dynamics of perception, representation, and self-representation —not just of clothing, but of bodies as well (Sweetman, 2007). In fact, digitalization and fashion have been intertwined phenomena since the beginning. The representation of bodies and the fashion industry are, in turn, inseparable phenomena: clothes envelop bodies, shape them, just as bodies shape clothes, from the size system to the sartorial dimension and design, in a circular relationship, sometimes synergic, sometimes problematic. Not only physical bodies (Zauner, 2023), but

also imagined bodies, canons of beauty and stereotypes are linked to this production process, both physical and medial (Yan, Bissell, 2014). Thinking about the role that fashion communication has played for years in shaping ideas of canonical beauty, especially in the West (Cheang *et al.*, 2022), it is inevitable to consider the influence of certain important players in the industry (Castaldo Lundén, 2020), first and foremost magazines, first in print format and then in their transition to multimedia and digital (Pedroni, Mora, 2023). Images of bodies and their stereotypes have played a crucial role in the construction of imaginaries, generating a series of potential issues, especially in relation to female bodies.

Taking as an example one of the most important players in the sector, *Vogue Italia* (Piccolo, 2019), one of the most relevant titles in the last decades from a graphic and communicative point of view, we can see some recurring (and in this case particularly conspicuous) dynamics in the sector’s communication. *Vogue* is a historical name in fashion industry publishing (Wissink, 2018). *Vogue* is the most important fashion magazine in promoting, historically and globally, models, ideas and representations in the fashion world, influencing generations of young women. The history of *Vogue* also allows us to reconstruct social, cultural and economic changes over time (Kopnina, 2007). At the same time, *Vogue* represents a system that produces imagery in a “top-down” manner; moreover, *Vogue Italia* is particularly important in the international fashion scenario, representing the “Made in Italy” way of making fashion, on the other hand it is one of the key actors in the creative cluster of the Italian fashion system (Pandolfi, 2015). Artistic curation, especially under the editorship of Franca Sozzani, has been the hallmark of the magazine’s quality and worldwide reputation for decades (Noia *et al.*, 2023). Indeed, the visual nature of the editorial

publication, together with the collaborations it has had over the years with internationally renowned photographers and artists, makes it an good example to describe how relevant this media is to fashion, its communication and dissemination (Kalbaska *et al.*, 2018). The direction of communication in this media was one-way, top-down, with no possibility of direct interaction. The authority (in this case *Vogue*) was the broadcaster, who univocally produced input that was then to become standard with the receiving public. With the advent of participatory forms and the interactive web, there has been a shift in this phenomenon, with the introduction of new possibilities for audiences to interact, to intervene in this dynamic, to become active (Kalbaska *et al.*, 2019). The diffusion of social media, nowadays indispensable especially for the fashion industry, has made this advancement even more multifaceted and complex, changing the cards even more, bringing to a new level a whole series of theories and theorisations that, before, were nothing more than speculations and ideas (Bruning *et al.*, 2020; Nielsen, Ganter, 2022). In this intertwining of dynamics, fashion plays a crucial role, just think of the emergence and growth of the phenomenon of online celebrities and influencers, from the very beginning linked inseparably to fashion (Pedroni, 2023). The advent of technologies and infrastructures has made possible the current media environment, where participatory platforms and social media platforms are now part of the ordinary existence of billions of people. This phenomenon has been studied mainly by considering the dynamics of influence, from celebrity culture to the role of influencers (Nannini, 2020; Muniesa, Giménez, 2020), moving more recently to virtual influencers (Arsenyan, Mirowska, 2021; Mortara, Roberti, 2022). This shift, the advent of non-material bodies in the industry, represents an important

element. Until now, fashion could not do without bodies: they are the protagonists of the industry in all its declinations. With the new digital possibilities, bodies begin to mutate. They are no longer necessarily bound to physicality, to matter, but become de-materialised, distinguished by their “non-thingness” (Han, 2022), potentially made of data, of information, and therefore malleable without physical limits. This phenomenon is not new in various other fields, from those related to digital media and technologies to those related to the visual arts, from illustration to comics, but it is even more crucial for one field in particular: video games (Cover, 2016). In video games, digital bodies are pivotal, they are an indispensable part of the dialectics and logic of many gaming platforms. The video game must necessarily rely on these digital physicality (Richardson, 2021), which allows one to act and intervene within its reality. The same applies to the visual dimension, which is crucial for the vast majority of video games and their enjoyment. Both these elements seem to be in common between the current communication of the fashion industry and that of video games, and these similarities seem to be confirmed by a growing phenomenon of hybridisation and cross-fertilisation between these two fields (Boughlala, Smelik, 2024).

Indeed, the video game world has become a terrain in which the fashion phenomenon has been able to experiment with some of the potential of new digital contexts: many collaborations between fashion brands and industries, software houses, and video game producers have flourished and multiplied. Some common ground between fashion and the digital environment has been addressed in the marketing and communication literature (Noris *et al.*, 2021), with a focus on collaborations between major fashion brands and video game entertainment

giants (Reay, Wanick, 2023). The world of video games has its rules, its reference imagery, its languages, its aesthetics, but one of the peculiarities of this world is the “other” physicality it allows. The entry of fashion into this field, with its rules, imagery and aesthetics, raises many questions and considerations, in this “interstitial” space and time, somewhere between the physical and the de-physical.

In the discourse of common sense, fashion and video games are often labelled as “frivolous” activities. As Simmel (1895) has previously pointed out, the charge of frivolity was one of the traits that defined the fashion phenomenon up until a few decades ago, but it may also be applied to video games today. Simmel did, in fact, associate frivolity with the state of women in his day, which was one of significant social exclusion. It was seen as a domain that lived on the outside of a more “serious” civilization that was centered on production and practicality and was ruled by males. In this way, fashion was a fun way to pass the time, even while it was connected to the pursuit of a gender and social identity. Contrary to fashion, video games have always had a more male style, with the business and marketing frequently favoring creations that are heavily gendered and described as “masculine” or “macho” (Smith, Moyer-Gusé, 2006). However, the massive popularity of video games, further accelerated during the pandemic (Vargo *et al.*, 2021), and their increasing economic value, have contributed to a change in the vision of video games, broadening market interest and the audience of gamers. These reasons underlie the intention of this chapter, namely to trace a preliminary exploration of one of the most popular gaming platform in order to observe whether, within it, the representation of

bodies, their instances and imaginaries (Hansen-Hansen 2020), follow dynamics common to those traditionally adopted by the fashion industry, or whether the possibilities of the digital, potentially democratising and untethered from the logics of pure physical materiality (Bae, 2022; Varini, 2023), act in a different and peculiar way.

2. Sampling

The video game world, within which we have decided to develop this reflection, is not only continuously expanding, but also extremely varied and changeable. The body of visual material that will be analysed in this chapter consists of the official images of League of Legends (*LoL*). These were selected, among other criteria, for the possibility of choosing a personal avatar, with certain predefined peculiarities, and for the presence of a multiplayer option. Here again, the intention is to try to understand what kind of representation of the body and gender is proposed, incorporated and discussed by consumers (Eckersley, Duff, 2020). In order to select which gaming platform to use, certain characteristics were defined:

- The possibility of being played online in multiplayer mode;
- The popularity of the chosen platform;
- The presence of anthropomorphic and gendered characters.

Regarding the first point, the social dimension of consumption and fruition is an important common point of contact between fashion (Choufan, 2022) and the world of









Rank	Game	Concurrent	30 Days	Gain 30D	Gain %
1	 Fortnite	#N/A	30,950,114	-3,839,113	-3.59
2	 Roblox	1,567,777	27,290,354	600,871	-1.55
3	 Minecraft	1,011,585	25,790,037	11,648,539	0.37
4	 League of Legends	1,087,792	14,000,061	972,337	-0.01
5	 Counter Strike 2	880,315	5,100,395	862,832	3.73
6	 Valorant	536,998	2,006,825	627,756	2.46
7	 Overwatch 2	123	1,419,252	97,044	-0.55
8	 Apex Legends	Loading...	8,446,804	809,521	-13.16

Figure 1. List of most Played Games 2025, screenshot acquired on 8 January 2025. Source: Active Player. <https://activeplayer.io/top-15-most-popular-pc-games-of-2022/>

video games. In the absence of a “social” component, the consumption and fruition of aesthetic or fashion products would become entirely marginal or would undergo different dynamics from those that characterise it in material content, and the same discourse can also be applied to bodies and their representations. Secondly, the popularity of the platform is a further common denominator between fashion and these videogame phenomena: diffusion and popularity are relevant aspects, both in terms of the extent of the phenomenon and the effects of imitation, emulation and ostentation, which have been the subject of attention since Veblen (2009) and Simmel. To define this parameter, reference was made to various statistics available online, in particular those released by the Active Player website, recognised as one of the most reliable in the field.

Finally, the presence of anthropomorphic characters (or at any rate, in the case of zoomorphic characters, with human connotations) (Koike, Loughnan, 2021) is necessary to explore the generative dynamics of fashion and body imagery. Thus, anthropomorphic (or human) figures are essential to the purpose of this chapter. Given these premises, the first platform that met these criteria was *League of Legends*.

3. Methodology

Now that the sample in question has been briefly clarified, it is necessary to explain the process of selecting the photographs. As seen above, the objective of this chapter is to explore the dynamics of top-down creation by the media and by the producers of communication products themselves. For this reason, all the sampled images come from the official website of the video game that is the subject of the research. The resulting database has a total of 1,783 entries, subdivided as follows:

The methodology adopted is mixed (Teddlie, Tashakkori, 2011), as it employs quantitative methods for data extraction and qualitative methods for the analysis process. As regards the analytical work, a grounded approach was adopted (Dey, 2004), and for this very reason some mention of the procedures followed is necessary. Since the interpretation of images is not an immediate process, it is necessary to adopt a dynamic system, which is constructed both from the data itself and based on previous knowledge and the visual abilities of the observer, in a cyclical process of co-construction of interpretations and meanings, which follow one another in a logical order (Penn, 2000; Eugeni, 2004).

Gaming Platform	Total images number	Number of Characters
LoL	1.783	166

Table 1. Sampling of the official images of *League of Legends* characters

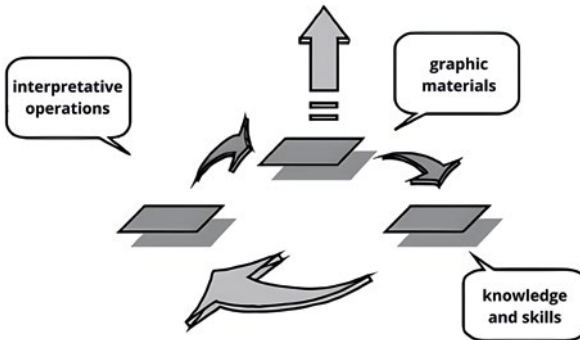


Figure 2. Eugeni, R. (2004) *Analisi semiotica dell'immagine*. Pittura, illustrazione, fotografia, EDUCatt, Università Cattolica, Milano, p. 21. Image translated by the author

4. First level of coding

A first level of coding developed concerned gender, species (being faced with a database in which not all characters are human), and ethnic origin. This first level of coding has limited biases, being objective and not requiring a level of interpretation by the researcher. The gender ratio in *League of Legends* is not equally divided; in fact we find a majority of male or male-dominated characters.

First level of coding: Gender (total)				
	Female	Male	ND	
LoL	62 (699)	102 (1.064)	2 (20)	
Total	699	1.064	2	1.783

Table 2. First level of coding according to category: gender and total number of images in each category

First level of coding: Species							
	Human	Half Human	Anthropomorphic	Beast	Anthropomorphic Beast	Cyborg	
LoL	1.047 (+12)*	147	153	51 (+12)*	280	93	
Total	1.059	147	153	63	280	93	1.795 (-12)*

Table 3. First level of coding according to category: Species.

* Refer to images with two characters in them, one belonging to the category “Human”, one belonging to the category “Beast”

Proceeding with the coding, the “species” dimension was examined.

To make the categories created by this first level of coding more understandable, we have included some examples below. We have decided to designate as “Half-human” any character that presents markedly anthropomorphic traits, even if not completely superimposable to human ones, with uncommon or preponderant elements of animal or technological hybridity. By way of example, we propose below a case among those mentioned above.



Figure 3. Kennen, official image of one of the characters from *League of Legends*

First level of coding: Ethnicity					
	Caucasian (F+M)	Afro (F+M)	Asian (F+M)	ND (F+M+ND)	
LoL	644 + 461	29 + 44	0 + 44	20 + 26 + 515	
Total	1.105	73	44	561	1.783

Table 4. First level of coding according to category: Ethnicity.
* Refer to images with two characters in them, one belonging to the “Human” category, one belonging to the “Beast” category

Also included in the “Anthropomorphic” category are those characters who, due to accessories, armour, covers, cannot be unambiguously identified and whose features are partially hidden, but who nonetheless present humanoid forms.



Figure 4. Senna, official image of one of the characters from *League of Legends*

The “Beast” category includes all those characters whose characteristics are animal-like, or in any case in which anthropomorphisation and elements that may lead back to the human figure are absent or in the minority. A similar discourse can be made for the category “anthropomorphic beast”, which differs from the previous one simply because of a more consistent presence of anthropomorphising elements. Finally, as far as the “Cyborg” category is concerned, this includes all those characters with robotic characteristics or, in any case, with a prevalence of technological and mechanical elements. As a third element of this introductory codification, the aspect of ethnicity was addressed, as mentioned above.

A significant number of characters, both male and female, fall into the “Caucasian” group, as can be seen in Table 4. Characters that fall into the “ND” category do not have adequate characteristics

to be attributed to an ethnic group or elements of racialisation; many of them are characters that belong to the “Cyborg” or “Beast” categories and do not display human or anthropomorphic traits. This category also includes images of characters entirely covered in armour, clothes or accessories that make it impossible to identify their features, either ethnically or gender connotations. As far as racial representations are concerned, stereotypes are preponderant (Abraham, Appiah, 2006), with a number of recurrences rather easy to identify. With regard to characters identifiable as “Afro”, for example, there are numerous references to hip hop culture and hairstyles inspired by dreadlocks. This is graphically evident in several cases within our sample, as well as a rather common phenomenon in the media landscape of yesterday and, especially, today (Ash *et al.*, 2021). We list below, by way of example, one referring to a female character. The character in question, Senna, has what we might call street clothes and dreadlocks.

5. Second level of coding

Having presented this first level of coding, which is more objective in nature and less subject to cultural or perceptual bias (Ostroot, Snyder, 1985), the analysis continues with a second level. All character bodies were coded according to their conformity or non-conformity to the models and canons of bodily beauty disseminated by mainstream fashion (Dwyer, 2004; Entwistle, 2023).

The relationship between bodies defined as “Conforming” to mainstream fashion stylistic features and those “Non-conforming” is unbalanced in favor of those aligned to

Second level of coding: Conformity			
	Conforming (F + M)	Non-Conforming (F + M)	
LoL	607 + 553 (1.160)	91 + 511 (602) + 21*	
Total	1.160	623*	1.783

Table 5. Second level of coding according to category: Conformity. * Refer to non-identifiable character images at the level of the “Genre” category

certain pre-existing stylistic features and imagery (Dawney, 2011; Stojanowski, Duncan, 2015). Included within the category “Non-conforming” are all those bodies that do not fully adhere to the gendered ideals of aesthetic beauty prevalent in Western culture, such as youthfulness, thinness, performativity, muscularity, sexualisation. Among them are several bodies with androgynous elements, some bodies that do not meet the criteria of thinness, some bodies that are not young. In *League of Legends* we find 8 images in total of older bodies, all depicting the same (male) character. These are the only images of non-young bodies in the entire database. Another exception are bodies with features that could be described as androgynous (68 in the entire sample). By “androgyny” we mean all those bodies that do not or do not fully conform to the binary stereotypes that exist in Western aesthetic imaginaries regarding gender differences (Chattopadhyay, 2020; Cusack *et al.*, 2022). A next level of analysis of the characters coded in the “Conformity” category consists of three particularly recurring aspects, muscularity, thinness, sexualisation.

Second level of coding: Conformity, sub-category “Muscularisation”			
	Muscularisation (F)	Muscularisation (M)	
LoL	16 + 1*	329 + 103*	
Total	17	431	448

Table 6. Second level of coding according to the category: Conformity, subcategory “Muscularisation”. * Cases in which the Muscularisation aspect is taken to the extreme

Second level of coding: Conformity, sub-category “Slimness”			
	Slimness (F)	Slimness (M)	
LoL	649	449 + 3*	
Total	649	452	1.101

Table 7. Second level of coding according to the category: Conformity, subcategory “Slimness”. * Cases in which the aspect of Slimness is taken to the extreme

With regard to muscularised or muscular bodies (Hargreaves, Tiggemann, 2009), images have been selected that emphasise (with varying levels of intensity) the performative, athletic and, indeed, muscular dimension of bodies. As can easily be guessed, this phenomenon is much more present when the analysis focuses on bodies connoted as male. This difference between the genders is one of the most consistent throughout the sample.

With regard to the aspect of thinness and skinny bodies (Volonté, 2021; Fixsen *et al.*, 2023), again with varying degrees of intensity. We see a partial reversal of the trend with respect to

Second level of coding: Conformity, sub-category “Sexualisation”			
	Sexualisation (F)	Sexualisation (M)	
LoL	293 + 80*	29	
Total	373	29	402

Table 8. Second level of coding according to the category: Conformity, subcategory “Sexualisation”. * Cases in which the aspect of Sexualisation is taken to the extreme



Figure 5. Janna, official image of one of the characters from *League of Legends*

muscularity, with a clear majority of these connotations within the sample consisting of female characters. Again, there are cases in which thinness is taken to the extreme, in a particularly evident manner. With regard to the female characters present within this coding, we find a certain recurrence, both at the

level of physical conformation and at the level of photographic compositions, very much in line with traditional advertising images (Dimitrieska, Efremova, 2020).

As in the two previous elements examined, the gender disproportion is evident. The phenomenon of sexualisation is particularly pronounced in the sample of female characters, again with varying degrees of intensity. The phenomenon of the sexualisation of female bodies in the media is well-known and present in the literature (Herndon, 2020), as is their stereotyping. Bodies that are canonically considered to be conforming, desirable, tend to be thin, lanky, Caucasian (Biefeld *et al.*, 2021), and these aspects are also confirmed in the sample examined here. In several cases, these characteristics are taken to extremes; we propose here an example.

6. Third level of coding

If for the first level of coding the data is simply reported, already in the second level of coding an interpretative dimension is introduced, which depends, despite possible countermeasures and precautions, on the person doing the coding. Gender, age, cultural background, socio-economic extraction, are all aspects that, however much the method and data transparency may mitigate, must be considered (Hammersley, Gomm, 1997). Trying to use as much caution as possible when carrying out this chapter, however, this dimension of non-uniqueness of interpretation must be kept in mind. Proceeding in the work of image analysis, a more abstract element must be introduced. The image is no longer just to be looked at, one must instead

attempt to “read” it (Kress, Van Leeuwen, 2020), as it is conceived as a “visual text, a fabric of signs whose conformations and correlations are functional to a project of interpretation aimed at the spectator”. The image becomes a meta-text, creating a multidirectional relationship between the spectator, the object of the gaze and the sum, reflexive, of this dynamic relationship. It becomes a “device for constructing relations between a spectator subject and certain symbolic entities” (Eugeni 2004). At this point in the analysis, we must therefore enter into a process of interpretation, decoding, born in and with the previous levels of observation. All images embody, contain and concretise messages, characters, stories, narratives, a peculiar “plot”. What we intend to do here is to identify recurring categories within the sample under examination in order to develop a third level of encoding related to imaginaries (Castoriadis, 1987; Strauss, 2006).

Certainly, references to “Dark Fantasy” can be found, which have connotations typical of fairy tales and fantasy novels, but with dark, gloomy, horror elements (Brock, 2014; Fabrizi, 2018). Representations ascribable to this imagery are often gloomy, with colours tending towards the dark and twilight, in dark or mysterious settings. Similarly, “Fantasy” elements are widespread, meaning fairy-tale references, but in which the same darkness and gloominess is not found. The references are of various kinds (Mendlesohn, 2002), often containing medievalism (Matthews, 2015), less gloomy colours, more defined and less hostile natural settings. References to the “Anime” world can also be easily found, with more or less explicit references to Asian culture (Sasaki, 2011; Cavallaro, 2013), settings rich in elements traditionally considered oriental (lanterns, fans, cherry blossoms), as well as the clothes

worn, which often recall kimonos or traditional clothes from the East. Finally, the last two clusters identified are the “Arcade” and the “Cyberpunk” clusters, which present certain similarities. The first of these can be traced back to a retro, pop aesthetic, partly coming from the gaming world of the 1980s and 1990s (Sharp, 2015), partly from the Vaporwave universe and online nostalgia, with utopian and futuristic references (Koc, 2017; Cole, 2020). The second presents instead futuristic, technological, robotic elements, with various nuances and facets often tending towards dystopia (Eriksen, 1991). The references range from science fiction to science fiction (Russ, 1975), as do the settings.

7. Conclusions

This chapter was developed with the aim of starting to conduct an exploration that could shed, partially, light on the dynamics of representations of bodies within the videogame context. This context was defined during the sampling phase, choosing to include only an online multiplayer video game, in order to keep within the chapter the “social” consumption dynamics typical of fashion and its communication, as reiterated on various occasions. From this observation, it doesn’t appear that there is a revolutionary shift in these images; on the contrary, many of the canons already known in fashion communication images, old and new, seem to be confirmed (Winterhalter, 2019). It should also be noted that, while fashion, especially in more recent years, has strongly increased its focus on inclusion and diversity (Prasad *et al.*, 2011; Doyle, Moore, 2023), in accordance with the increasingly attentive sensitivities to these aspects in society and consumers, the videogame world on

which we have decided to focus our gaze does not seem to show the same sensitivity. Bodies are, in the vast majority, performative. The imagery developed by the entire sample would seem to be outdated, linked to stereotypes surpassed (or being surpassed) by the fashion industry, but generated by it over the years. The female body as the “supermodel” (Tovée *et al.*, 1997), faultless, accessible, available, the passive subject of observant gazes, and the male body as the “macho man” (Mosher, 1991), strong, athletic, sculptural. Aspects such as muscularity, thinness, stereotypical aesthetic beauty (and especially in the cases of female characters, hyper sexualised), are dominant. At the level of photographic compositions, images with a single subject prevail, and this aspect is also a similarity to traditional fashion communication, especially editorial (Smedley, 2013). These characteristics and aesthetics are mediated by the video game medium, with its own rules and characteristic elements, which autonomously aim at constructing “heroes”, emphasising aspects such as strength, dexterity, extraordinary abilities of the protagonists (Varini, 2024), not moving in a way that is entirely in agreement with the new instances and demands that instead seem to be received by the fashion world. One aspect that must be considered is that, in visual analysis, no matter how much one tries to limit arbitrariness with methodological countermeasures, my judgement is inevitably subject to biases of various kinds (Wall *et al.*, 2018), such as the cultural background, age, social position, and gender of the researcher himself.

When we talk about the stories that images can tell, they are elicited in the observer, in a specific observer. Imaginaries, however, socially shared they may be, are infinitely multifaceted and non-repeatable. Probably, if the same image were shown to an observer from a different cultural, geographical and demo-

graphic context, it would evoke totally or partially different reactions and imaginings. This aspect is another element in common with fashion, which until extremely recent years was a Eurocentric phenomenon, peculiar to the Western society (Cheang, 2022). This aspect should also be analysed, because the dynamics of mixing, of cultural hybridisation, of practices in different social and geographical contexts are certainly a key piece in understanding some of the mechanisms of the phenomenon. Another possible starting point for continuing this chapter would seem to come from the sample itself: instances of gender, political movements, rights and protests also find space within these dematerialised “places” and emerge even when the object of research would appear to be frivolous and unimportant, as in the case of fashion within gaming platforms. The almost total lack of non-formalised beauty models could be an element to investigate directly with gamers, perhaps in different geographical contexts and in different age cohorts, to understand how this type of hegemonic communication is assimilated or rejected, accepted or rejected. And again, all these aspects should also be explored outside the culture of reference of the author of this chapter and in which these contents were largely produced and disseminated. To non-Western eyes, what do these images say? Finally, especially with reference to the images produced according to top-down dynamics, it is impossible not to notice that the most conspicuous (and most questionable) phenomena concern female bodies: women are the object of the male gaze, they are the object of the gaze of others.

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Intermedial strategies of montage in cinema, dance and theatrical dance¹

Paulo Filipe Monteiro

Abstract. Theatre and dance plays have come to rely more on collage and montage than on narrative. Indetermination and chaos generated “strange attractions”. We will study the special case of Pina Bausch, since:

- Her genius for montage made her assemble all the materials she created with her group in a very cinematographic and musical way (Eugène Dupréel’s theory of consolidation will be a useful tool).
- This calls for intermedial approaches
- Bausch herself directed a film where we can further dwell in the questions of montage and intermediality

Keywords: intermediality · cinema · Pina Bausch · montage · consolidation

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Intermediality should learn from its history. How do we interpret and intend the *Gesamt*, the being together, in contemporary projects of a *Gesamtkunstwerk*? As fusion, as was explicit in the initial idea by Wagner? Brecht replied that working with Wagner's proposal led to confusion, not fusion, and he preferred to work on "a radical separation of the elements". I quote Brecht (1964):

As long as the expression "total work of art" means a whole that is a pure and simple mixture, as long as the arts have thus to be "con-fused", all the varied elements will remain identically degraded in themselves, to the extent that it is only possible for them to serve as a cue to others. This process of fusion also encompasses the spectator, equally merged into the whole and representing the passive (suffering) part of the work of "global art". We must combat this form of magic. [...] Actors, decorators, makeup artists, dressmakers, musicians and choreographers shall put their art at the service of a common task, without forgetting their independence. (pp. 24–25)

At the same time as Brecht, but in France, Antonin Artaud (1896–1948), while arguing that "a notion of an integral spectacle must be reestablished", also envisioned this totality as being dissonant, instead of fusional. We cannot, our should not, put aside these modes of connection that are different from fusion. Pethō (2011) has argued that the convergence of elements from different media implies a transformation which is superior to the sum of its parts. I certainly agree, but I would not go as far as to subscribe to Heinrich and Spielmann's view that, conceptually, intermedia denotes a fusion instead of an

accumulation of media, or that there has been an evolution from relationships to fusion, as some academics conclude from the 2007 classification by Clüver (2007).

Instead, I will be suggesting we follow Vattimo's (1990) path, retrieving the concepts of *Stoss* in Heidegger and *Chock* in Benjamin as a way to capture the essential features of the new "essence" of art in the society of late industrialization. We can also add, as Lehmann (2002)² does, the concepts of what is "sudden" (Bohrer) or of "being-attacked" (Adorno).

Lehmann (2002) created the expression "post-dramatic theater" to talk about the new currents that, starting in the 70s, and without yet becoming dominant, are transforming stage proposals. Under this designation, he mixes very diverse types of work, but we can try to summarize some of the characteristics that are most interesting in the scope of a discussion on montage:

- abandonment of the models of totality and social solidarity, which, according to Turner and Schechner (1985), served as the basis for the dramatic model of rupture, crisis and reconciliation;
- abandonment of grand narratives, macro structures, coherence and above all the teleological organization of a beginning and an end, envisioning a totality;

2 I have developed some of his concepts in a conference in Buenos Aires, later published as "El ritmo en el teatro nuevo y en el teatro-danza", in Carla Fonseca (org.), *Ritmidades: cuerpos en jira*, Buenos Aires, Jornadas Internacionales el Ritmo en las Artes, 2020.

- the postdramatic theater destroyed, or even abandoned, the idea of theater as a representation of a fictitious cosmos, the closure of which was fundamental for the drama (even in Brecht's epic theater or in the theater of the absurd): this attenuated the principles of narration and figuration, as well as the order of a fable and the existence of characters;
- "The speeches in the scene are closer to the structure of dreams and seem to relate to the dream world of their creators. The non-hierarchy between images, movements and words predominates in the dream. [...] In psychoanalytic hermeneutics, we speak of 'equally floating attention'" (Lehmann, 2002, p. 131), a name inherited from Freud. Blau (1992) also speaks of "floating apprehension", of waking dreams, of the "sleepwalking aesthetic", especially in relation to Bob Wilson's shows.

With their meaning "in suspension" (Lehmann, 2002, pp. 11–12), post-dramatic spectacles are organized in presences, situations, atmospheres, events, happenings, exceptions, catastrophes, moments of deviation, and therefore rhythms. Lehmann (2002) also recovers the term "states", which present a set rather than a story, as in painting (many of the post-dramatic theater artists come from the visual arts). It is also interesting to highlight the musical component that necessarily has to exist when moving from dramatic dynamics to scenic dynamics. It is not by chance that Sarrazac (2011) speaks of "rhapsodic"-structures in the new theater.

"The de-hierarchization of theatrical procedures represents a continuous and inherent principle of post-dramatic theater" (already anticipated by the theatrical texts of Gertrud

Stein). And “differentiated genres are linked in a representation (dance, narrative text, circus, performance...); all media are used and have the same importance” (Lehmann, 2002, pp. 135–136). All this implies a decisive role for collage and montage, as in cinema, expressionism, and surrealism (whose legacy was in this way more lasting than futurism or the Dada movement). Hence, in the essay dedicated to editing methods, Eisenstein (1985) “insists so much on the analogy of cinema with music, since music is one of the rare artistic practices not legitimized by the representation of reality, capable of unleashing strong emotional states from its pure matter” (pp. 59–70) and its assembly.

However, it was not only in the editing room that rhythmic issues proved to be decisive. It was first of all in the rejection of a time that mimics or reproduces everyday time. “The disintegration of time as a continuum is revealed as the sign of the dissolution or, at least, of the subversion of the subject that possesses the certainty of its own time”, because it can no longer guide or link radically discontinuous experiences (Lehmann, 2002, p. 251). Some forms of post-dramatic theater tend to change the psychological development of actions and characters, either in accelerated rhythms of perception, resulting in shows of less than one hour, or working with slow motion, immobilization, and repetition —ways of gaining an awareness of time that we do not have in everyday rhythms.

The rhythmic question also becomes decisive when the actor’s own work begins to be seen in terms of presence and energy. Barba (1994) conceptualizes the scene from a notion of soul as vibration and movement, simultaneously interior and exterior. “Before being thought of as an essentially spir-

itual, Platonic and Christian substance”, the word *anima* “indicated a wind, a continuous flow that animated the life and movement of the animal and of the human being. In many cultures the body is compared to an instrument of percussion: the *anima* is blow, vibration, rhythm. Boccaccio said, commenting on Dante and recapitulating the attitude of an ancient culture, that as *anima*, the living and intimate wind, it tends towards something external, it transforms into *Animus*” (Barba, 1994, p. 97).

Surely, music and rhythm always existed. Aristotle recalls, in *Politics* (Book VIII), that there seems to be in us a kind of affinity with musical modes and rhythms, which makes some philosophers say that the soul is a tuning, others that it possesses the tuning. In Aristotelian poetics, recalls Marin (1994), the narrative itself has a double effect of pleasure: a cognitive pleasure belonging to the narrated, to the domination of time and death, and a pleasure linked to the narration itself, as instance of enunciation, to the mastery of language in the act of creation. What happened with the modernists, and even more so with the postmodernists, was a retreat from the cognitive dimension in favor of image and music —as thinkers like Steiner (1971) have never ceased to lament. “De la musique, avant toute chose”, sang Verlaine (1884). In a poem against Eliot, the modernist Wallace Stevens spoke of the “creations of sound” (this was the very title of one of his poems; Stevens, 1944). And Fernando Pessoa, in the Bernardo Soares version, was looking for “a construction of myself in music and gradations”: “God is a question of rhythm” (as cited in Gil, 2016, p. 15).

Decades later, with postmodernism, authors such as Eduardo Prado Coelho, based on Françoise Proust, will proclaim:

won't music be the true structuring principle of time, and not the narrative and the threads of its intrigues, as Ricoeur thinks? Or [...]: will there be people whose time is made of narratives and people whose time is made of music? Will we be moving from a time-narrative to a time-music? a chance-time? Will Paul Auster be right when he speaks about the "music of chance"? (Coelho, 1994, p. 23).

Music and chance are linked, as we will see in the case of the performing arts. "The scientific conceptions of an universe rhythmmed alternately by the expansions and contractions of chaos and game theory contributed to dedramatizing reality" (Lehmann, 2002, p. 286). Marianne van Kerkhoven "establishes a relationship between new theatrical languages and chaos theory, which claims that reality consists more of unstable systems than of hermetic circuits" (Lehmann, 2002, p. 130).

Indeed, chaos theory represented a great challenge to classical physics, showing precisely that a few seemingly insignificant decimal places, over time, can cause monumental changes (the flapping of a butterfly's wings in Brazil can cause a tornado in Texas). But this does not mean everything moves randomly, disorderly, or unpredictably. Chaos itself actually creates patterns over time. As chaotic as it may seem, a system follows a trajectory to certain points. These system destination points are known as "attractors" —and some of them are called "strange attractors" (Gleick, 1987).

While Kerkhoven established a relation between the new theatrical languages and the theory of chaos, Herbert Blau considered that performance strategies were changed in order to correspond to the new principles of indetermination and

chance, so dear to Antonioni or to Paul Auster. Blau (1992) relates the theories of indetermination and transformations in performance:

When [...] the principles of indetermination began to absorb the scientific imagination, transporting a vision of the material universe that no longer met with the expectations of empirical cause and effect, the possibilities and strategies of performance were altered to match them. In a sense, this has become a new realism. [...] Indeterminacy has become at the same time a reality and a method. (pp. 52–53)

This structuring by music can lead to shows like *The show must go on*, by Jérôme Bel (2001), where, between the audience and the stage, a very present DJ plays the successive music that the performers seek to accompany.

The Pina Bausch scene

Now that we summarized the context, we can proceed to our case study, Pina Bausch's dance-theater. I admire her greatly and I have had the rare privilege of being invited by her in 2000 to follow her work in Germany.

A constant element of Pina Bausch's work is simultaneity, parataxis: when a group moves in a certain mood, there is almost always an element (or several) that are in another, and this contrast greatly enhances both atmospheres. To use Deleuze and Guattari's image, it is like the rainforest, which ensures within itself the counterpoints of it: "the territorial

motifs form rhythmic faces or characters, and the territorial counterpoints melodic landscapes” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980, p. 391).

Pina Bausch (in this aspect close to Laban³) used to say that she did not do her work from the beginning to the end but from the inside to the outside. This phrase has several implications, and some complications.

Pina Bausch always started from the inside in the sense that all of her work was based on the proposals that the dancers made, in response to her questions and provocations. This was one of the pathways that Lehmann emphasized: the narrative fades but does not disappear, it can become “the transmission of a personal experience” of the performers (Lehmann, 2002, p. 173). In Bausch’s *Tanztheater*, the performers had a very strong personal commitment, since the material emerged from their life stories, their imagination and their bodies. They were “interpreters” of themselves. From the anima to the animus.⁴

But the movements that result from this internal life are not necessarily the psychological translation of the internal state. It is far more complex than that, less expressionistic. To begin with, Bausch collects the lessons that come from

3 Von Labán says that the movement is danced when the “external action is subordinated to the internal feeling” (Gil, 2001, p. 14).

4 Freud’s reversal by authors such as Meltzer and Bion: instead of considering that in the unconscious, for example in dreams, we only work on the experiences of waking life, we recognize the inner world as having its own life, as a nucleus filled with the meaning of experience that requires transformation into symbolic form to be conceived and understood, allowing the spirit to grow and develop (Monteiro, 1986).

Stanislavski and his disciples such as Michael Tcheckov: interior time, in which the internal life moves, is different from external time, from physical actions. Only in psychotics is there uniqueness of their time-rhythm, without contradiction. “People who are considered psychically normal live in permanent conflict between the perception of objective reality and the representation (interpretation) of that reality. Hence the permanent divergence between interior action (‘Interior Monologue’) and physical action (words and movements)” (Kusnet, 1992, p. 91). For example, a seller in a street market, under the sun on a very hot day may feel drowsy, weak, apathetic, but she has to shout loudly and happily. Rigoletto, humiliated, in panic, cannot stop singing: Trala-lara-lara-lara-lara-lara.

Furthermore, the movements generated by the internal life then undergo a triple work: 1) confrontation; 2) decontextualization and 3) montage. Confrontation, because the proposals might be intimate but they are presented in front of the whole group. “Paradoxical proliferation of singularities —because it is about something that is valid for all dancers. Far from abolishing singularity, the group feeling only accentuates it” (Gil, 2001, p. 222).⁵ Decontextualization, because the characters are constantly “decontextualized, by reference to the normal situation corresponding to their action” (Gil, 2001, p. 226), which makes the scenes unusual and disturbing. Music itself is often decontextualized: from a well-known work

5 In the aforementioned Jérôme Bel show we only had that feeling in a final scene, in which each one was listening to his own music and dancing it.

or author a fragment can be used that we do not recognize. Decontextualization also proceeds from the fact that often the movements do not correspond to the contexts that we know or guess from the music.

And then comes the montage: based on the proposals of her performers, Pina Bausch selected small fragments. Several dancers vented to me: “I proposed such a good solo and Pina only took advantage of one little part.” It will work for the piece as a “strange attractor”, described in chaos theory. Adding that little thing to other little things produced results even more extraordinary than the initial proposals. One of Pina Bausch’s genius was the process of montage, something she did alone, in a very mysterious way. I suggest that we try to look at that mystery.

It seems to me that Pina worked on the montage of her pieces in a way that was apparently opposite to the method she used with her dancers: it is true she did not build the scenes in a teleological way, with a beginning, middle and end, but she seemed to edit from the outside to the inside. The emerging materials were later selected by her profound intuition, so that “the first images produced by the responses develop into a vast network of relationships and gestures that ‘progressively acquire an inner logic’” (Gil, 2001, p. 217).

When Pina Bausch associates a certain phrase with images —or even, when she extracts some associations from the set of those that her dancers make—, she is attentive to the movement of connection of the images, or of the images and of gestures. This is how ramifications are formed that will gradually build the nexus of the work (Gil, 2001, pp. 218–219).

Bausch hated the obvious. Furthermore, she liked what she didn't have a name for nor did she know what it was. One of the first things she told me when I arrived in Wuppertal was: "never tell me that something is pretty, otherwise I cannot use it". It took me some time to understand that. She worked in the antipodes of the current processes in which many artists start from an agenda with two or three themes (such as gender issues, ecology, post-colonialism), then develop a concept, well theorized in a title and a synopsis, which finally they apply in a work that somehow exemplifies or illustrates it (Monteiro, 2018, pp. 28–29). Gil (2001) explains very well how, on the contrary, "Pina Bausch works at the level of the unthinkable of thought and the unactionable of the act" (p. 223).

This "materialist" method of starting from small fragments and then see where the piece ends up is the opposite of the ideological art that is widely done today (starting from a supposedly political issue and illustrating it with the work). It also differs from the process of other creators, such as the filmmaker Ingmar Bergman, who said: "a film for me begins with something very vague [...] a state of mind. [...] Then comes a very complicated and difficult phase: the transformation of rhythms, moods, atmospheres, tensions, sequences, tones and smells into words and phrases, into a script that is perceived" (Bergman, 1974, pp. xiii–xxii). Bergman confesses: "I have often wished for a kind of notation which would enable me to put on paper all the shades and tones of my vision, to record distinctly the inner structure of the film" —a score like the ones musicians use.

In Pina Bausch, the states of mind, the atmospheres, the rhythms were not prior, they were emerging until the premiere, without fear of chance, nor of indetermination, nor of chaos.

She had enormous difficulty in giving titles to her works, which were announced as “a new piece by Pina Bausch”. It was not until three days before the premiere that they got a title. In her own words: “It seems very chaotic but somehow it makes sense”.⁶ That sense was also without possible description, without name. I have testified how the dancers, even though the piece was based on their proposals, performed at the premiere without totally knowing what they were doing: only throughout the presentations did they perceive how the work “somehow made sense”.

But how did she operate? Creating a rhythmic machine with movements, words, screams, explosions and their exhaustions. A crucial element was the shock, and by that I do not mean only the alternation of strong and weak beats that constitutes rhythm in music, in physiology, in the heart, in the stars, in amoebas, in physics, in the visual arts, in poetry. I am referring to the above-mentioned recovery by Gianni Vattimo (1990, pp. 21; 71–72) of the concepts of *Stoss* in Heidegger and *Chock* in Benjamin. Concepts that Lehmann (2002) says to be

a fundamental motif of the theory of art and (post-dramatic) theater: the idea of shock (Benjamin), halfway between a psychological and aesthetic category; of what is “sudden” (Bohrer), of “being-assaulted” (Adorno), of the fright that “is necessary for recognition” (Brecht), of the idea that dread is “the first appearance of the new” (Heiner Müller), of the threat that “nothing will be produced” (Lyotard). (p. 232)

⁶ Bausch says it in minute 12 of Lee Yanor’s film, *Coffee with Pina: a film with the choreographer Pina Bausch*.

We can also trace this back to Eisenstein, for whom montage had to do with emotional shocks, that are not so much founded by the thematic level of the narrative or drama, or of the reality represented, but that radically depend on the abstract formalization of a hypothetical cinelanguage (Geda, 1985, p. 48).

In Pina Bausch, the clash exists, “violence always erupts and leaves its trace, even if the regime of forces suddenly changes. The abrupt shifts, which are so many becomings, vacillate between catastrophe and childish play” (Gil, 2001, p. 227). But the most common process in Pina is that of fading, of the dissolution of a scene when it is felt that it is going to be exhausted, of the emptying of a theme or of a state or of an atmosphere that is going to give way to another, sometimes already embryonic in the previous one, other times by juxtaposition or parataxis, within a “floating attention”, close to dreaming.

The Pina Bausch’s film

Music was very impressive in all of Pina Bausch’s shows. But, except in her first pieces, she created the movements without music: she had two collaborators who exhaustively searched for songs from all over the world to fit the scenes. I testified a scene that had a song by Amália Rodrigues being changed, a few days before the premiere, for a song by Billie Holiday. That is to say, the dancer could not be attached to the music and its rhythm and its mood, neither for the external movements, nor, as often happens on stage, to support his/her internal time-rhythm.

This method of not starting from the music is different from what almost all choreographers do (and from what Pina herself did in her first shows): it does not take advantage of the movement that the music itself induces, it starts from the body, which then goes to receive music. To use the Deleuze and Guattari's terms⁷, it does not go from the germ to the soma, but rather it goes from the soma to the germ (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980, p. 431). Music is played after the movement to help create the atmosphere; and since the work is based on paradoxes, that matching is often paradoxical.

But there is more to it. As seen especially in Bausch's 1990 film *The Complaint of the Empress*, music also serves as consolidation. Eugène Dupréel proposed a "theory of consolidation" in 1939, which Bachelard and Deleuze took up. For Dupréel, "life does not go from a center to an exteriority, but from an exterior to an interior, or better, from a *flou* or discrete set to its consolidation". This implies "that there is no beginning from which a linear suite would derive but densifications, intensifications, reinforcements, injections, *truffages*", but with intervals, inequalities, to the point that, "to consolidate, sometimes you have to make a hole" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980, p. 405).

7 The painter goes from the soma to the germ, from the body of light and color that he produces, "while the musician has a kind of germinal continuity, even latent, even indirect, from which he produces his sound bodies": "He goes from the germ to the soma".

It is no longer a question of imposing a form on a matter, but of creating an increasingly richer, more consistent material, capable from then on of capturing increasingly intense forces. What makes a material increasingly richer is what makes heterogeneous things stay together, without ceasing to be heterogeneous (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980, p. 406).

From this results a rhizomatic articulation, instead of arborified:

there is no longer a form or a good structure that is imposed, neither from the outside nor from above, but rather an articulation from within, as if the oscillating molecules, the oscillators, will move from one heterogeneous center to another, even if it is to ensure the domination of one of them (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980, p. 404).

What happens in this film is that music gives the cadence but does not entirely establish the rhythm. The rhythm is, on the contrary, ensured by the passages and contrasts between each scene, by the exchanges and reactions between elements devoid of natural affinity. This film is an extraordinary example of how

the action is done in one medium, while the rhythm is situated between two mediums, or between two in-betweens, as between two waters, between two hours, between dog and wolf, twilight or *zwielicht*, *hecciteit*. To change media, *pris sur le vif*, is the rhythm (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980, p. 285).

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Collective memory in a liminal form: commemoration of Queen Elizabeth on UK front pages

Susan Keith

Abstract. The death of Queen Elizabeth II on September 8, 2022, posed a conundrum for print newspapers: How does a print media outlet present, in a visually interesting way, information that many readers will have already learned from digital or broadcast sources? Drawing on evidence from the front pages of 58 newspapers published in the United Kingdom the day after the Queen's death, this chapter argues that in such situations, print newspapers—a liminal media form—act as a space for collective memory. Print newspapers, which have been relieved by newer media of their duty to break news, published page-filling images of the Queen that sought to evoke emotion rather than inform.

Keywords: queen · newspapers · front page · collective memory · liminality

Introduction

On September 8, 2022, Queen Elizabeth II died at Balmoral Castle in Scotland, an event that set off an orchestrated series of funeral plans and a flurry of news coverage around the world. Elizabeth's death, which took up 426 pages in the UK's national newspapers the next day (Ponsford, 2022), was significant for many reasons. She was the only monarch most residents of the United Kingdom and the Commonwealth had known. She had ruled for 70 years and 214 days —longer than any other British monarch and longer, by some accounts, than any monarch except France's Louis XIV (O'Kane, 2022). In addition, she was the embodiment of the crown in an age when 35% of Britons thought that the monarchy should be abolished, was not at all important or not very important (Hill, 2023).

Within the Queen's family, her passing led to the ascent to the throne of her already-septuagenarian firstborn son, who would receive a cancer diagnosis within 17 months (Coughlan, 2024). It also signaled a potential shift in royal relations with her grandson, Prince Harry, who had moved to the United States, charging that the royal family had failed to respond appropriately to attacks on his mixed-race American wife, Meghan Markle (Prince Harry, 2023). In addition, the Queen's death left Prince Andrew, sometimes described as Elizabeth's favorite child (Cawthorne, 2023), without what reportedly had been indulgence related to his housing in the wake of links to the late pedophile financier Jeffrey Epstein (Crawford-Smith, 2024).

For UK print daily newspapers, the Queen's death posed a conundrum that had become increasingly salient over the previous 20 years: How does a media outlet present, in a visually interest-

ing way, information that many readers will have already heard about from digital or broadcast sources? This article argues that the Queen's death is one example of newspapers—in their late, liminal form—making a visual appeal to collective memory when they can no longer act on their original purpose as the breakers of news. To explain how the newspapers made this shift, the paper analyzes visual commemorations of the queen's life on 58 UK front pages from September 9, 2022. It draws on concepts of collective memory as well as conceptions of liminality to discuss narratives present in the visual commemoration.

This look back at the immediate commemoration of the death of a monarch takes on poignancy as her successor, Charles III, endures a cancer that Buckingham Palace had not, as of May 2025, fully explained—just as it had not explained what type of cancer Catherine, Princess of Wales, was treated for in 2024 (Coughlan, 2025). If Charles fully recovers and reigns into an old age like that of his mother, his life no doubt will be commemorated by news media quite different from the UK print newspapers of 2022. Deaths among major worldwide figures in the next few years, however, seem likely to involve print media following patterns seen in the commemoration of Queen Elizabeth's life, which makes those patterns useful to understand.

Contextualizing the research

This article connects with theory and literature from several areas: research on newspaper front pages from journalism studies and mass communication; collective memory, which grew out of sociology; and notions of liminality, which are interdisciplinary.

Understanding the front page

The front page has long been viewed as the most important page of a print newspaper and, beyond that, as a cultural symbol. It has traditionally functioned, as Rupar (2007) has written, “as a display that declares the truth of the previous day’s events” and “depicts newsworthy parts of reality and presents them according to an imagined order of importance within a greater social context”. Front pages act as visual advertisements for the entire newspaper or, as Le (2012) put it, “gateways to the news selected for presentation in the entire print or online news issue” (p. 32). Although daily print newspaper circulation, once driven by subscriptions to home delivery of printed newspapers (Hurter & Van Buer, 1996), has declined sharply in many parts of the world (Henriksson, 2024; Newspapers fact sheet, 2023), in cities where newsstands play a key role in the distribution of journalism, the front page “is what passers-by will have chance to look at, ... might determine whether or not they will end up buying the newspaper” (Zubiaga, 2013). Even as newspapers increasingly moved content online, some continue to publish “e editions” or “replica editions,” digital forms, best read on tablets, that look like a print newspaper (Edmonds, 2020).

In addition, the print front page has continued to have special meaning for journalists, with reporters competing to have their articles featured on “A1” (Gibson, 2011). At *The New York Times* as late as 2019 a reporter landing an article on the front page for the first time was still given a plate used to print that page (Daley, 2019). At some legacy newspaper companies, the meeting where coverage is planned is referred to as the “front-

page meeting”, even when, as one editor told researchers, “Most of our readers are consuming the information from the website” (Tenenboim-Weinblatt & Neiger, 2018, p. 44). As late as 2019, *The New York Times* had a separate meeting to iron out choices for the print front page —though choices were “never far out of alignment with those being made for the web”.

The newspaper front page also serves important symbolic functions in society beyond the delivery of news. In fictional film and television narratives, images of real or imagined newspaper front pages are used to telegraph plot developments or note the passage of time (Roysdon, 2024). In the real world, individuals and institutions save front pages as mementos of events of historical, educational, and emotional significance (McDonald, 2024). Freed by their internet arms of much of the duty of breaking news, print newspapers leaned into this commemorative role during the 20teens and early 2020s, developing new routines for mourning the passing of people who were icons to Baby Boomers —print newspapers’ most loyal readers. In a “meta” twist, this commemorative form has become the subject of a new type of news article, one that traces, with images, how some selection of print newspapers has covered an important event (e.g., Yerushalmy, 2022), including the death of Queen Elizabeth (e.g., *Telegraph* reporters, 2022; Crisp, 2022.)

Collective memory and the front page

In focusing on commemoration, print newspapers contribute to collective mediated memory of aspects of the past. “Collective memory”, a term that appears to have originated with

Austrian poet, dramatist, and essayist Hugo von Hofmannsthal in 1902 (Olick & Robbins, 1998), was popularized by French sociologist and philosopher Maurice Halbwachs, especially after the latter's work was translated into English in the late 20th century (Neiger, 2020). Halbwachs (1992) believed that "the mind reconstructs its memories under the pressure of society" (p. 51) and that each individual memory was lasting only to "the extent that it is connected with the thoughts that come to us from the social milieu" (p. 53). In other words, individuals' memories are formed in the context of the communities, cultures, and societies in which the individuals are embedded. We "remember as a member of the group ... and employ the conceptions shared by its members" (Halbwachs, 1980, p. 26), which results in memory narratives and themes being shared among communities and societies.

These collective memories can be conveyed and cemented, later memory scholars argued, through media (Kitch, 2005; Neiger, 2020), including photographic images. A photograph makes a particularly poignant contribution to memory, Ruchatz (2008) writes, because it "refers to a particular and singular moment in time that is inevitably past when the finished print is looked at. ... What is certified to have been present, but is no more, can be looked at as if it still was" (p. 370).

The front page as a liminal media form

Finally, print newspapers and their front pages can be understood as liminal media forms of the early 21st century, something that exists in an "intermediate state, phase, or

condition” (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). The concept of liminality —originated by Arnold van Gennep, a German-born French ethnographer, and popularized in English by British anthropologist Victor Turner (1969)— was originally used in anthropology to denote “the middle phase of any ritual process that can be divided ... into three analytically distinct phases during which an individual undergoes a transition from one social status to another” (Wels *et al.*, 2011, p. 1). In the middle phase, Wels *et al.* (2011) wrote, “the individuals involved are understood to be ‘no longer’ and simultaneously also ‘not yet’” (p. 1).

When liminality has been evoked in the communication subfield of journalism studies, it has sometimes been applied to practitioners or models that are on the fringes of current journalism practice but seen to be operating adjacent to or with the potential to invade the journalism space. For example, Ananny and Crawford (2015) interviewed designers of mobile phone- and tablet-based news apps and concluded that they were part of the “liminal press”, “working in a space between technology design and journalism, influenced by both but not entirely beholden to either” (p. 204). Liminality can also be seen, however, as running in the opposite direction, in which a thing significant to a social context can be evaluated not only for its emergence but for its disappearance. In that sense, print newspapers and their front pages —whose demise has been predicted for decades (Cole, 2018; Meyer, 2004)— can be understood to be “no longer” ubiquitous but “not yet” gone. It is at this intersection of being and not being cultural icons that the front pages focused on the death of Queen Elizabeth II exist.

Literature about coverage of the Queen's death

Together, these theoretical backgrounds provide a perspective not articulated in the research that has examined how news media covered Queen Elizabeth II's death and the "well-rehearsed pageantry of mourning" (Gullace *et al.*, 2023, p. 477) that followed. Most of this research has focused on broadcast or social media and has given scant attention to visual components of coverage. For example, Prasadini and Palupi (2023) examined the types of information contained in initial UK television announcements of the Queen's death, and Nuzulia and Firmonasari (2023) compared metaphors for death used by the BBC and *The Guardian*, finding that they were largely similar, focused on a "departure" or "the end of a journey". Defining coverage of the Queen's death, especially on the BBC, as a "media event" of the type described by Dayan and Katz (1992), scholars Clancy (2024), Hallgren (2024), and Sumiala *et al.* (2025) have argued—in slightly different ways—that a counter commentary developed through social media posts and memes that tied the queen to colonialism.

One study that did consider newspapers (Aziz, 2023) analyzed headlines and images of the Queen on 11 newspaper front pages and found that the two elements worked in concert to create a sense of "a somber event of mourning and respect" (p. 47). In contrast, a study of 61 selected front pages from around the world (Darwish *et al.*, 2024) found that the pages tended to pair cheerful images of the Queen with what the study labeled "euphemistic" headlines, which avoided words such as "die", "dead" and "death". The authors suggested this was evidence that "humans, consciously and unconsciously, safeguard themselves against the discourse of death by utilizing both linguistic and semiotic euphemisms" (p. 2046).

Method

This article builds on that work by analyzing visual choices on 58 Sept. 9, 2022, front pages from the United Kingdom, where the Queen was best known, and the royal family perhaps most often criticized. Forty-one of the front pages were from England (including 11 London-based titles), 10 from Scotland, six from Wales, and one from Northern Ireland.

The front pages were identified in three ways. First, images of UK front pages were downloaded from Today's Front Pages, a website remnant of the Newseum, a Washington, D.C., museum of news that closed in 2019. Second, news articles and industry reports about front-page coverage of the queen's death were mined for images of front pages. Third, some front pages were located through Google searches for "front page" and "Queen's death" or cognate terms. Next, the pages were classified, based on the content and context of the images used, with reverse image search employed to help identify the source and date of key images.

Remembering the Queen

Each of the 58 front pages used at least one photograph of the queen, frequently a close-up, though there was variation in which version of Elizabeth II —young queen, mother, older woman— was shown. In a departure from the newspapers' normal design practices, a photograph generally filled all or most of the front page, with headlines frequently superimposed on the image. (Only seven of the front pages used two photo-

graphs, most often a small image of the younger queen inset into a larger image of the older monarch.) The design often evoked not a newspaper, but the sort of portrait of a deceased person placed on view at a memorial service.

More than half the front pages (55.2%) used an image of the Queen as an older woman, evoking collective memory by portraying Elizabeth as the largest number of readers would remember her: as a grandmotherly figure. These images, however, varied greatly in color, content, and affect. Four of the front pages —those of the venerable *Times* of London, the sober *Daily Telegraph*, the middle-market London tabloid the *Daily Express*, and the *North Wales Daily Post*— used the black and white image of Elizabeth, taken on her 80th birthday by octogenarian photographer Jane Bown, that was provided by Buckingham Palace upon the Queen’s death (Braun, 2022). Other front pages captured the older Elizabeth in the bright solid-color ensembles she increasingly wore after the 1990s (Praderio & Lakritz, 2018). For example, the front page of *City A.M.*, a free business-focused newspaper distributed in London, used an image of the Queen in a light pink coat and hat she wore to a Buckingham Palace garden party in 2019, and the *Daily Echo* (a regional tabloid based in Southampton, England) showed the Elizabeth in a dark purple ensemble on a 2020 visit to MI5, the UK’s domestic counter-intelligence and security agency.

Eleven of the front pages (19%), portrayed Elizabeth, alone, as a younger queen or mother —as only readers in their late 70s or older would be able to remember her. Four of those front pages— in the London-based national dailies *The Guardian*, *The Independent*, the *Daily Star* and *i* (known since 2024 as

The i Paper)—displayed Elizabeth’s official 1953 coronation portrait by Cecil Beaton, which shows the Queen wearing the Imperial State Crown, holding an orb and a scepter, and sitting in front of a painted backdrop of the Henry VII Lady Chapel at Westminster Abbey (Brown, n.d.)— an image that evoked for some the dissolution of the British Empire and for others the history of colonialism (Mechkarini *et al.*, 2023). Other front pages used a black-and-white photo made on February 26, 1952, 20 days after Elizabeth ascended to the throne, for use on stamps and currency (Antrim, 2022; Buckingham Palace, 2022); 1952 images of the Queen and her corgis taken by Lisa Sheridan at Balmoral; and a 1957 image of the Queen giving that year’s Christmas address, the first to be televised (Frost, 2020). For most readers, these images could evoke not a time they recalled, but only a history they may have learned.

Interestingly, only three of the front pages pictured the Queen in what might be described as middle age. Most notably *The Financial Times* showed a smiling Elizabeth arriving in a carriage for the state opening of Parliament in 1984, when she was 58. These images are from a time that teeters between the 21st century appearance of the Queen that many readers would recall and mid-20th century portrayals that are slipping from memory into history.

Only five front pages showed the Queen with other people. Four newspapers based in smaller cities or towns used images of Elizabeth visiting the area, one of which also showed Prince Philip. By selecting these images—which generally were less technically strong than professional portraits— newspapers such as the *Daily Gazette* of Colchester emphasized local ties to the monarch. These images evoked memories not shared with most of the United Kingdom and let the newspapers lead readers

toward claiming the Queen as “ours”. Interestingly, only one front-page image connected the monarch with her replacement. The front page of the *Evening Express* of Aberdeen, Scotland, used a 1952 Sheridan photo of King Charles III, then 3½, leaning out a window at Balmoral with the Queen (Henni, 2022).

Because many of the images used on the UK front pages in this study depicted the Queen at public events, where her job was, in part, to portray a joyful countenance, most of the front-page images or main images (34 or about 59%) showed her with a parted-lips smile. The prevalence of photographs in which the Queen was smiling widely was at odds with the somber nature of front pages noted by Aziz (2023) and sometimes contributed to visual-verbal dissonance. Images of a smiling Queen presented little mismatch when paired with simple headlines such as “Queen Elizabeth II 1926–2022” —used in some variation on 29 front pages and perhaps less the euphemistic practice that Darwish *et al.* (2024) saw than a translation into a print memorial of the life markers one might see on a tombstone. However, some newspapers, such as the *Western Mail* from Cardiff, Wales, and the *Hull Daily Mail* from Yorkshire, paired a somber headline, such as “a moment of the greatest sadness” —words from King Charles’ September 8 message to the country— with an image of a broadly smiling Elizabeth. On these pages, the Queen appears as if she “still was”, while the words of the headline remind readers that she “is no more” (Ruchartz, 2008, p. 370), creating a sharp visual-verbal incongruence.

A few front pages provided counterpoints to the smiling grandmotherly images. Thirteen of the front pages, or 22%, used an image or main image —including the Beaton and post

office/mint portraits— with a neutral valance, which allowed them to avoid jarring pairings of headline and image.¹ A few front pages used sterner images of Elizabeth II. For example, *The Herald* of Scotland used a portrait shot by Julian Calder in 2010 on the moors near Balmoral that depicted the Queen, with a creased brow, in a green robe, as Queen of Scots, Sovereign of the Most Ancient and Most Noble Order of the Thistle and Chief of the Chiefs (Perry, 2022).

Front pages as memory centers

Despite their variety, the 58 UK front pages examined point to one purpose for the print newspaper front page in its liminal state, between everyday media object and almost-in-evitable extinction. Like traditional news-focused newspaper front pages, the front pages published in the UK on September 9, 2022, aimed to command the attention of readers at newsstands and in other places where they might be picked up (Zubiaga, 2013). In addition, the front pages served as advertisements for the contents inside the edition (Le, 2012), often special sections about the Queen's life. What they did not attempt to do was convey news. Instead, they served a commemorative function, acting as centers of conventional memory at a moment of the death of a leader,

1 The rest of front pages depicted the Queen with a variety of expressions—closed-mouth smile (5), strained smile (1), concerned countenance (2), severe look (2), or apparently in the act of speaking (1).

whose legacy was complicated by the UK's history of empire and colonialism, her own family's messy histories, and opinions about the cost of the monarchy. These memories were largely conventional, following approved narratives noted largely in broadcast media by Clancy (2024), Hallgren (2024), and Sumiala *et al.* (2025). Because of most UK newspapers' more localized nature, however, the front pages offered more room for community-oriented memorialization, for Scottish newspapers to choose images—in what likely were pre-planned sections, prepared as news of the Queen's declining health was released—that emphasized the Queen's connection to her summer residence, Balmoral Castle, and for smaller newspapers to comb through their archives for images of the Queen's local visits.

This suggests that one future for print newspapers, in an even later liminal phase, may be as occasional commemorative issues tied to memorialization of the heroes of the Baby Boom and Generation X, whose members were exposed to newspapers during their more robust era. Just as the magazine industry long produced a variety of special retrospective issues (Kitch, 2006), newspaper companies may find it profitable to do the same. Image choice will be the key to the appeal of such publications.

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Little room for disruption and experimentation: dominant patterns in the design of state-funded German feature films

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Abstract. This paper aims to identify dominant patterns in the design of German feature films. Such a concern is particularly relevant because the German film funding system is accused of being responsible for the high degree of conventionality in national film. In order to determine the rhetoric and aesthetics with which cinematic reality is presented, the study analyzes 40 commercially or artistically successful feature films from the years 2012 to 2020. The findings show that, almost without exception, these films make use of firmly established storytelling tools and audiovisual styles. Moreover, as there seems to be little room for disruption and experimentation, for unusual or innovative modes of expression, the spectrum of what is possible in film is barely explored. The paper concludes that, without greater narrative and stylistic openness, German cinema risks losing its vitality —both domestically and on the international stage.

Keywords: German film · film analysis · storytelling · audiovisual style

1. Introduction

Against the backdrop of Germany's powerful film funding system, this paper aims to identify dominant patterns in the design of German feature films. Based on an analysis of 40 film productions from 2012 to 2020, it is argued that German filmmaking almost exclusively relies on firmly established storytelling tools and audiovisual styles. While the rhetoric and aesthetics employed operate within a narrowly defined framework, German state-funded cinema appears to leave little room for disruption and experimentation, for unusual or even innovative modes of expression.

When discussing German film with international colleagues, the name of filmmaker Rainer Werner Fassbinder and other representatives of the New German Cinema from the 1960s and 1970s —such as Werner Herzog, Alexander Kluge, or Wim Wenders— is still among the first to be mentioned. In addition to this era of artistically ambitious German auteur cinema, often associated with the French *Nouvelle Vague*, international cinephiles are also familiar with the so-called “Berlin School” of independent filmmakers. This movement, which has been widely discussed in English-language scholarship on German cinema (*cf.* Abel, 2013; Cook, 2015; Cook *et al.*, 2013; Roy & Leweke, 2013), emerged in the late 1990s and is often described as breaking with mainstream cinematic norms. It created non-commercial, visually rich films with sparse dialogue, employing a cold emotional register and a dry, observational storytelling style. Furthermore, international literature has noted the shift away from the “cinema of consensus” starting in the early 2000s, which had previously characterized German

filmmaking, particularly through a high output of commercially driven romantic comedies (*cf.* Rentschler, 2000). Key examples of this shift include globally recognized productions such as *Head-On* (Akin, 2004) and *The Lives of Others* (Henckel von Donnersmarck, 2006), both of which garnered international acclaim. The perception of a diverse German film landscape (*cf.* Cooke & Homewood, 2011; Fisher & Prager, 2010; Mueller & Skidmore, 2012) was further reinforced by *Toni Erdmann* (Ade, 2016), a comedy-drama that premiered at Cannes Film Festival, was named best film of the year by *Cahiers du Cinéma*, and won multiple European Film Awards. A more recent example is *All Quiet on the Western Front* (Berger, 2022), which premiered at Toronto International Film Festival, was immediately released on Netflix, and won several Academy Awards.

In contrast, the domestic perception of German filmmaking is rather mixed. The image of German cinema is far from favorable, and according to experts, the German film industry has been in a structural crisis for quite some time, one that appears increasingly severe as it persists. This is first reflected in the modest audience reception of German productions in cinemas. The market share of domestic films in recent years has been around 25 percent (*cf.* German Federal Film Board, 2024), significantly lower than in comparable European neighboring countries. Additionally, cinema revenues in Germany have been declining for some time, a trend that predates the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, the domestic production sector struggles with profitability issues, especially due to a lack of major international commissions. At the same time, mainstream blockbusters, particularly comedies, which achieve the highest box office results domestically, are difficult to market

internationally. Meanwhile, according to prevailing opinion, artistically ambitious art productions receive only limited recognition at international festivals and award ceremonies. From an internal perspective, exceptional cases such as *Toni Erdmann* (Ade, 2016) or *All Quiet on the Western Front* (Berger, 2022) are generally considered outliers rather than indicative of a broader trend.

For some time now, German film criticism has lamented that German cinema is overly predictable in terms of content and form, primarily concerned with meeting specific standards. What is apparently to blame for this is the powerful film funding system, a sentiment shared within the industry itself. This system, consisting of various institutions at federal and state levels, allocates over half a billion euros annually to nearly every facet of German cinema in order to mitigate the competitive disadvantages of the socially relevant product of film at the international level and on the world market (*cf.* German Federal Film Board, 2024). However, it is also associated with lengthy decision-making processes, extensive bureaucracy, and conflicting interests. In other words, although film funding serves as an enabling structure, it also entails a loss of autonomy for filmmakers, limiting both economic agency and artistic freedom.

Research has already shown that German filmmaking has a political dimension and reflects social hierarchies that extend beyond economic parameters (*cf.* Wiedemann, 2020). This is particularly evident in the underprivileged role of women in the German film industry (*cf.* Baer & Fenner, 2018; Loist & Prommer, 2019). Moreover, it is not unfounded to assume that the limited diversity behind the camera is reflected

in cinematic representations, shaping filmic expression and aesthetics. This study takes up precisely these issues and asks whether the compromise-oriented approach favored by the film funding system — often criticized as prioritizing breadth over excellence— actually comes at the expense of cinematic and narrative artistry. What components define German films, and how diverse are their forms and styles? Put differently, how groundbreaking and thought-provoking can German cinema be? How extensive can its rhetorical and aesthetic toolbox truly be if it must always comply with economic and cultural policy objectives?

The next section provides an overview of the study's research framework, its method and source material. The main findings are then presented and discussed in the results section and subsequently placed in a broader context in the conclusion.

2. Research design

The study presented here is part of a larger research project that examined the discursive rules of reality construction in German feature films. This project was funded by the German Research Foundation for a period of three years. A key focus of the research was on cinematic forms of expression, specifically the techniques employed to construct reality in a particular way. The methodological approach consisted of a qualitative, category-based film analysis. More precisely, the rhetoric and aesthetics of the films were addressed using the following categories, which are not uncommon in film analysis (*cf.* Ryan & Lenos, 2012; Benshoff, 2016): genre; time and temporal setting

of the plot; dramaturgy (relationship between plot and story); time structure (narrated time vs. narrative time); language and linguistic expression; visual imagery and metaphors; audiovisual design (camera work, editing, production design, lighting, color, sound); acting; and film locations.

The objective was, notably, to identify dominant or particularly characteristic patterns in the design of German feature films. Therefore, the study examined 40 successful German feature films from the past one and a half decades, specifically from the years 2012 to 2020. To ensure balance and diversity, the sample was composed according to three key criteria: First, it included an equal number of comedies and dramas — since, apart from children’s films, almost the entire output of German feature films can be categorized within these two major genres. Second, the sample consisted equally of commercially and artistically successful film productions. The selection criteria were, in terms of commercial performance, that a film had to attract at least 500,000 viewers in German cinemas, a benchmark typically surpassed by around 15 national feature films each year, or, in terms of artistic merit, that a film had to be nominated for the German Film Award in a prominent category (e.g., best film). Third, the selection aimed to cover films that addressed a wide range of life domains. With an adequate number of cases, this was ultimately achieved for the following thematic areas: work and economy; education and upbringing; family, friendship, and love; flight and migration; gender; illness and disability; stages of life; and politics and history.

Since the results section largely avoids individual film descriptions and mainly presents findings in an aggregated manner, it must be noted here that the sample includes, on the

one hand, chart breakers such as *Head Full of Honey* (Schweiger, 2014), *Welcome to Germany* (Verhoeven, 2016), and *All About Me* (Link, 2018)—the most successful German films at the box office in these years. On the other hand, the selected films include prize-winning art films such as *Toni Erdmann* (Ade, 2016), already mentioned, but also *Oh Boy* (Gerster, 2012), *Victoria* (Schipper, 2016), *System Crasher* (Fingscheidt, 2019), and *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (Qurbani, 2020). Finally, the film analysis was complemented by the examination of additional research documents, in particular public statements by the filmmakers, information provided by distributors, as well as film reviews.

3. Findings

The results section is structured in three steps. First, it outlines the central findings regarding the storytelling tools found in the feature films analyzed. Second, it addresses recurring patterns in their audiovisual style. Finally, it discusses the most prominent blind spots that emerge.

3.1. Storytelling tools

Among the dominant storytelling tools in German cinema is apparently, first and foremost, a strong adherence to the conventions of the genres to which the films belong. Deviations from these norms are rare. The comedies in the sample—mostly among the commercially successful productions— follow

familiar patterns: family or romantic comedies, teen, gender, or disability comedies. Their tone is usually light-hearted, featuring mild conflicts and harmonious or surprising resolutions. Exaggerations and overtly caricatured characters are common, especially in character-driven comedies such as *Frau Müller muss weg!* (Wortmann, 2015), which centers on a conflict between parents and a teacher. Many of these films include elements of screwball comedy, as in the buddy comedy *100 Things* directed by Florian David Fitz (2018). Mistaken identities and confusion are frequent plot devices (see *High Society*; Decker, 2017). Humor, gags, and slapstick —often in the form of situational or verbal wit— are essential. These are clearly feel-good films, primarily designed for entertainment, though some include light social criticism (e.g., the immigration comedy *Welcome to Germany*; Verhoeven, 2016).

The other major genre in the sample is drama, which is less uniform. These films include family, relationship, and youth dramas, as well as social or political dramas. Typically, they have a somber tone and strive for authenticity. They are either restrained and sober or intense and emotional —but always serious and unsettling. Life is portrayed as a struggle. The central characters often face crises or extreme situations. They grieve, suffer loss, or endure trauma, persecution, and violence, which force them to rebuild their lives. Examples include the rape drama *All is Well* (Trobisch, 2018) and the abortion drama *24 Weeks* (Berrached, 2016).

Yet, most of the films in the sample draw on established subgenres. Among the comedies, this includes the culture-clash format, which features the forced but ultimately beneficial interaction of different cultures, social classes, or generations

(see *Wir sind die Neuen*; Westhoff, 2014). The road movie, with its theme of escape and self-discovery, also appears frequently (*25 km/h*; Goller, 2018). Romantic comedies focus on love overcoming all obstacles (*Text for You*; Herfurth, 2016), and another popular form is the tragicomedy, where comic and somber moments alternate but end on a hopeful note (*My Blind Date with Life*; Rothmund, 2017). Furthermore, both comedies and dramas often include coming-of-age elements, focusing on young people navigating identity and emancipation (e.g., the neo-Nazi drama *Combat Girls*; Wnendt, 2012). Love stories are also common in dramas, though less idealized than in romantic comedies (*Cocoon*; Krippendorff, 2020). Melodramas explore deep emotional and psychological conflicts and often end in tragedy (*Undine*; Petzold, 2020). Some films incorporate elements of thrillers (*Victoria*; Schipper, 2016) or courtroom dramas (*The Collini Case*; Kreuzpaintner, 2019). Historical films also play an important role, drawing on real events or biographies (*The People vs. Fritz Bauer*; Kraume, 2015; *All About Me*; Link, 2018). However, it is important to mention that genre conventions are rarely subverted.

Beyond of that, most of the films are set in the present day. Some refer even directly to current events or recent history. Historical films, of course, are the exception, all of which are set in the 20th century, often focusing on the Nazi era of the 1930s and 1940s, post-war history of West Germany and the GDR (e.g., *Balloon*; Herbig, 2018).

Furthermore, nearly all the films follow a fixed script and draw on established storytelling traditions. Central to these are disrupted relationships, crises, and boundary-crossings, leading either to a restoration of order or a changed worldview. The

same applies to character settings: Protagonists almost always undergo development. They pursue goals, face resistance, endure setbacks, and are forced to make difficult decisions. Thereby, most plots follow a classical three-act structure and closed dramaturgy, with a clearly defined beginning and end. This is particularly evident in the comedies, which consistently resolve their core conflicts (e.g., *Das schönste Mädchen der Welt*; Lehmann, 2019), but also in the dramas, which often culminate in transformation, insight, failure, or collapse. In contrast, only two films — *Victoria* (Schipper, 2016) and the low-budget love story *Love Steaks* (Lass, 2013)— dispense with a full screenplay and instead only rely on treatments and improvisation, whereas two other films of the sample, *Oh Boy* (Gerster, 2012) and *System Crasher* (Fingscheidt, 2019), intentionally use a looser structure made up of episodic scenes with little narrative progression.

Additionally, most of the analyzed films adopt an indirect, character-centered perspective. Their plots are generally chronological, with linear, causally linked storytelling. Temporal compression is common, often used to express characters' perceptions and emotional states. Flashbacks are used occasionally, but only one film (*All About Me*; Link, 2018) includes a flash-forward. Finally, the majority of films last between 90 and 120 minutes. Only eight exceed this, and only a few can be considered epic: *Victoria* (Schipper, 2016) with 140 minutes, *Toni Erdmann* (Ade, 2016) with 162 minutes, *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (Qurbani, 2020) with 183 minutes, and *Never Look Away* (Henckel von Donnersmarck, 2018), which depicts the life of painter Gerhard Richter, with 189 minutes. The time span of most stories ranges from several weeks to one year. Only four films aim for a stricter

unity of time (e.g., the chamber drama *Frau Müller muss weg!*; Wortmann, 2015). The only clear outlier in the sample, again, is the historical epic *Never Look Away* (Henckel von Donnersmarck, 2018), which spans half a lifetime.

3.2. Audiovisual style

The fact that German feature films —at least in the cases examined here— rarely move beyond the familiar is also evident in their audiovisual style. A characteristic shared by almost all films in the sample is a medium language register: everyday in tone, yet expressive in style. This varies depending on the social milieu portrayed. Notable examples include the brutally direct, sometimes vulgar yet emotionally charged language of youth (e.g., *Suck Me Shakespeare* and *Suck Me Shakespeare 2*; Dagtekin, 2013, 2015); the contrasting verbal styles of upper and lower classes (as in *The Manny*; Schweighöfer, 2015); and the coarse male banter when men are among themselves (*Männerhort*; Meyer Price, 2014). Additionally, comedies in the sample often rely on fast-paced, witty dialogue rich in wordplay and quick retorts. In addition to the two *Suck Me Shakespeare* films (Dagtekin, 2013, 2015), this is evident in *Toni Erdmann* (Ade, 2016) and *The Bloom of Yesterday* (Kraus, 2016). In contrast, it is hardly surprising that the language in dramas is consistently serious and the dialogue more sparse, though always precise and weighty (e.g., *In the Fade*; Akin, 2017). Some films —especially *Herbert* (Stuber, 2015), a social study of an aging, terminally ill boxer, and the sea-rescue drama *Styx* (Fischer, 2018)— are marked by a notable reduction of language, or even near-silence.

A recurring feature in symbolic imagery is the frequent use of nature metaphors. Examples include the torrential rain in *In the Fade* (Akin, 2017), which reflects the protagonist's grief after the murder of her husband and son, and the blood moon in the coming-of-age romance *Cocoon* (Krippendorff, 2020). The image of the caterpillar and its metamorphosis into a butterfly also appears in several films.

While no single statement about camera work can be made for all films in the sample, certain tendencies emerge. Often, it is the interplay of static and dynamic shots, shifting focus, changing perspectives, and varied framing that shapes the rhythm of a film. Patterns are most expressive in artistically successful productions. Striking examples include the calm, measured camerawork in the youth drama *4 Kings* (Eltz, 2015) and the intensive use of handheld camera in *System Crasher* (Fingscheidt, 2019) and *Love Steaks* (Lass, 2013). This technique conveys energy, immediacy, and subjectivity, emphasizing the protagonists' search for orientation — also seen in *And Tomorrow the Entire World* (Heinz, 2020). But across many of the films, point-of-view shots and close-ups are common, while distancing is often limited to medium long shots.

It is equally unsurprising that the comedies rely heavily on rapid, sharp cuts to increase pace. This is particularly true for *Suck Me Shakespeare* (Dagtekin, 2013), its sequel (Dagtekin, 2015), *Die Goldfische* (Golafshan, 2019), a heart-warming comedy about inclusion, and the generational clash comedy *Granny Nanny* (Groos, 2020). In contrast, artistically ambitious productions tend to use longer takes, which allow emotional intensity to unfold — sometimes to an almost unbearable degree, as seen in *24 Weeks* (Berrached, 2016) and *Toni Erd-*

mann (Ade, 2016). Frequently employed editing techniques also include parallel editing and montage sequences, the latter especially in comedies. Interestingly, only a handful of the films make extensive use of special effects. Besides *Never Look Away* (Henckel von Donnersmarck, 2018), this includes *The Manny* (Schweighöfer, 2015), the spy thriller *Blame Game* (Leinemann, 2019), and the World War II drama *The Captain* (Schwentke, 2017).

Genre conventions are also reflected in the use of lighting, color, and sound —likely influenced by available budgets. Many mainstream productions are brightly lit and highly visible, projecting a cheerful atmosphere and optimism. In other films, a naturalistic lighting style prevails. Mainstream comedies are generally colorful and saturated, whereas artistically inclined films tend to stick with natural tones and use contrasts more deliberately. Only two films in the sample are shot in black and white —*Oh Boy* (Gerster, 2012) and *The Captain* (Schwentke, 2017). Sound design follows a similar logic. Lighthearted mainstream productions are rarely quiet, whereas silence —or carefully placed individual sounds— is often reserved for the more artistically ambitious films. The same applies to the use of music: Commercially successful films typically feature extensive and scene-spanning musical scores. In contrast, music in artistically successful works is used sparingly, but with strong intentionality.

Two final aspects should be mentioned: First, the films analyzed here feature the who's who of the German acting scene, with both commercial and artistic productions showcasing prominent casts, even in supporting roles. The frequent appearance of familiar faces does not seem to detract from audience engagement,

even if it sometimes shifts focus away from nuanced character interpretation. Second, most films with explicit geographical settings are located in Berlin or Munich, often including post-card-like establishing shots. A likely reason for this is the strong financial support from regional film funding boards based in these cities —among the most well-funded in Germany.

3.3. Blind spots

Taking a step back from the analysis of individual films to consider a broader picture, it becomes strikingly clear that the films in the sample, with very few exceptions, exhibit a high degree of narrative and aesthetic conventionality. Only rarely do they display traces of artistic idiosyncrasy. This begins with the fact that established genre conventions are almost never abandoned. For instance, only one film in the sample can be classified as a dark comedy (*The Bloom of Yesterday*; Kraus, 2016), and only one as a fairy tale (*Undine*; Petzold, 2020). Pure slapstick comedies and action films, musicals, disaster or apocalyptic scenarios, as well as mystery, fantasy, or science fiction films, are entirely absent. It is also noteworthy, as previously mentioned, that none of the films take place outside of the present or the last 100 years. The era of the First World War or the German Empire, the 19th or 18th century, as well as future settings —utopias and dystopias— are all omitted. Films that are epochal or completely timeless are few and far between.

In terms of dramaturgy, the films also demonstrate limited willingness to experiment. It is evident that spontaneity has little room in these tightly scripted productions. Even grand

visions appear to be carefully fitted into pre-established frameworks. Very few films depart from traditional structures or explore unconventional narrative forms. There is no complete break from the three-act structure, and open endings are rare. Likewise, one looks in vain for narrative formats involving multiple, loosely connected plotlines, nonlinear storytelling, or departures from logical causality. Character design also tends to follow conventional patterns. There is no main character who lacks clear goals or development. Only once do we encounter a passive protagonist (*Oh Boy*; Gerster, 2012) and an anti-hero (*The Captain*; Schwentke, 2017). Serious antagonists, such as in *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (Qurbani, 2020), are rare, as are films with a truly rich ensemble of characters, such as *Never Look Away* (Henckel von Donnersmarck, 2018).

Moreover, variations in language use are similarly absent. Dialogue is never artificial and seldom purposeless. Dialect plays only a marginal role, and language-based communication problems are largely avoided. The same can be said of non-functional images —those that are primarily visual or emotional in nature rather than narrative. In general, the films' aesthetics remain within the boundaries of proven, professionally executed conventions. Little space is left for visual experimentation, artistic exaggeration, or the development of new (independent) visual styles. This also applies to production design: There are no extravagant sets, but also no radically minimalist environments. Likewise, the use of lighting and color schemes tends to avoid bold or unexpected choices.

Casting practices are also marked by a lack of creativity or innovation. Unknown actors are rarely seen, and non-professional performers appear only in minor roles. International

stars are the exception, such as Franco Nero in *The Collini Case* (Kreuzpaintner, 2019) or Diane Kruger, who long ago moved into the French and Hollywood film industries, in *In the Fade* (Akin, 2017). Finally, one notable blind spot is geographical: almost none of the films are set in rural areas or provincial regions. Instead, they overwhelmingly take place in stylized urban settings, most often, as already indicated, Berlin or Munich.

4. Conclusion

The broader research project on the discursive construction of social reality in German state-funded cinema, within which this study is situated, finds that cinematic meaning-making in Germany is shaped by discursive positions that remain within a narrowly defined frame, showing little diversity of perspective and rarely challenging dominant knowledge structures. The patterns in narrative and aesthetic design identified in this paper support this finding. The analysis of 40 commercially or artistically successful German feature films produced between 2012 and 2020 reveals a strong reliance on firmly established storytelling tools and audiovisual styles. This includes the preferred subgenres, the dominant dramaturgical and stylistic choices, the casting of high-profile actors, and the use of familiar local settings. In short, even in terms of rhetoric and aesthetics, German state-funded rarely crosses boundaries. It appears to allow little room for disruption and experimentation, for unusual or innovative modes of expression; the creative potential of what cinema could be remains largely unexplored. In other

words, at least for the cases examined here, public criticism of the overly predictable nature of German feature films is not without merit. Given these findings, the frequent critique of the film funding architecture —seen as sluggish and structurally conservative— also appears justified. At the very least, it does not seem that the funding system has, in recent years, succeeded in fundamentally countering the much-lamented negative image of German cinema at home.

Of course, it must be acknowledged that the findings in this study are based on a relatively limited sample of films — those that achieved notable commercial or artistic success. It is certainly possible that German films beyond box office hits and award contenders offer greater stylistic diversity. However, it must also be noted that the 40 films analyzed here have enjoyed maximum public visibility. They are regarded as benchmarks by both the film funding system and the industry and are therefore likely to serve as models for future productions.

In recent years, the political debate surrounding film in Germany has gained renewed momentum —intensified also by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic— and culminated at the beginning of 2025 in an initial reform of the national film funding system. This reform aims to address the pressing issues in the German film industry outlined at the beginning of this paper. Whether the measures introduced so far —particularly the aim to streamline funding structures, more clearly separate economic and cultural funding, and further develop automatic funding models— will be sufficient to enable a creative, diverse, and internationally competitive German cinema in the long term remains to be seen. Ultimately, the issue at stake goes beyond structural or economic concerns: it is about

the ability of a national cinema to narrate social realities in a plurality of voices, to take aesthetic risks, and to open narrative spaces beyond the familiar. If the funding system continues to prioritize safety and consensus, there is a real risk that German cinema will fall behind in terms of artistic and discursive innovation —both domestically and on the international stage. It would be a welcome development if the ongoing reforms were able to counteract this trend. But such a transformation can only be assessed in the medium term.

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This e-book *Arts, Concepts and Technologies* intends to publish texts written by authors about the three themes of the title from seven countries: Brazil, Germany, India, Italy, Portugal, Spain and Uruguay. The main idea is to expose ways to understand the themes by authors who develop their insightful ideas in two idioms: English and Spanish. All authors are VIC —Visual Culture— Members and VIC is one of the IAMCR —International Association for Media and Communication Research— Working Groups.

VIC deals with visibility in Arts, Cinema & Audiovisual, Photography and New Technologies as VR, AR and IA, focusing on artistic and cultural studies from a critical viewpoint. The texts in this e-book portray the evolution of visual aspects and digital media emphasizing history and memory and the many changes produced by new technologies that are creating new ways to understand and describe contemporaneity within digital frames.