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IAFOR Journal of Media, Communication & Film

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Editor's Introduction

The *IAFOR Journal of Media, Communication and Film* (IJMCF) is associated with IAFOR's *MediAsia*, *FilmAsia* and *EuroMedia* annual conferences. IJMCF is committed to publishing peer-reviewed scholarship that explores the relationship between society, film and media – including new and digital media, as well as to giving a voice to scholars whose work explores hitherto unexamined aspects of contemporary media and visual culture.

This fifth issue of the *IAFOR Journal of Media, Communication and Film* features contributions from multiple disciplines and nations from around the globe, and reflects upon the concept of reality. From Plato and Aristotle to Bazin and Baudrillard, reality and realism have been topics of reflection, debate, articulation and re-articulation in (among other fields) philosophy, media, communication, and film. Photographers and documentary filmmakers, theorists, and writers have pondered the indexical connections between image and mechanical reproduction; the construction of subjective reality; and the attempt to capture reality. In contemporary journalism "fake news" is a topic of (occasionally politicized) discussion. While television genres capitalise on a "reality" that is often more akin to fiction than fact. The articles in this issue present ruminations on the notion of reality in television, film, music, and literature.

The issue starts its exploration of reality with two articles that reflect upon the intersection between notions of reality and the production and consumption of texts. "Documenting the (Un)official Kevin Carter Narrative: Encyclopedism, Irrealism, and Intimization in *House of Leaves*" explores the ways in which the novel *House of Leaves* finds stability within interconnections of the (unstable and) numerous paratexts of the novel. Adopting critical theory and documentary theory, the article posits the reader's relationship with the text to be one that transcends boundaries between fiction and fact, and one that is grounded in belief. In a context when realism is a construct (as documentary theory argues), belief becomes central to the coherence of the text as well as anchoring it between official-unofficial and fiction-nonfiction binaries. In "Reality of Trap: Trap Music and its Emancipatory Potential", trap music which originated in the South of America becomes a lens through which to reflect upon the "reality" of late capitalism. Adopting the perspectives of Foucault, Mbembe, Balibar, Marx, Moretti, and Deleuze and Guattari, the article argues for the emancipatory potential of identification with trap music, through which Deleuze and Guattari's notion of "becoming-minoritarian" can find expression.

The next two articles explore the relationship between fiction film and reality. "Whose Story is This? The Non-existence of The External Gaze in David Lynch's Films" attempts to locate the relative viewing position of the audience of Lynch's films. It argues that, in a Lynchian universe, attempts to seek truth and reality through an external gaze is futile as the construction of Lynch's films highlight and reveal the artificial nature of material reality. Exploring the view of the audience thus exposes the lack of boundaries between fictional and material reality, and the subjectivity of the experience of reality. Conversely, the material world is considered a forceful presence in the article "*The Chronicle of Yerevan Days*: Spatial Representation and Authentic Realism", which examines the mediation of the city space and its impact on the narrative. Through the integration of "documentary narration" of the physical spaces of buildings and streets, the article argues that the real city gains agency as a character within the film, as well as infusing the action and (fictional) characters with a form of historical, cultural, and emotional authenticity.

Finally, two articles explore the presentation and representation of elements of reality on television. "Metaconsumption, Convergence and Stylization in the "Real" Teens of *Laguna Beach*" examines the portray of the real in the reality series *Laguna Beach*, arguing that the stylization of consumption in the series evokes the metaconsumption of a convergence culture, ultimately serving to reinforce the reality of the series' cast and the believability of their actions. Finally, "Sexualization of the Journalism Profession: TV Representation of Female Journalists' Intellect, Labor, and Bodies" examines the representation of female journalists in the television series *House of Cards* and *The Following*, analysing the ways in which mediated representations of women in the profession contributes to the gendering and sexualisation of female journalists in "reality". Through thematic content analysis, the article argues that femininity, sexuality, and the bodies of the characters appear at the core of discourses of female journalists, and considers the implications of such representation on the journalistic profession.

The JMCF Editorial Board owes a debt of gratitude to our external peer reviewers, notably Dr Laura Aguiar (Nerve Centre, UK), Dr Kate Ames (Central Queensland University), Dr Sarah Attfield (University of Technology Sydney), Dr Rasha El-Ibiary (Future University in Egypt), Sarah Feinstein (University of Manchester), Dr Zoran Lee Pecic (Roskilde University), and Dr Paul Spicer (Hiroshima Jogakuin University). We would also like to extend our sincere thanks to the IAFOR Publications Desk, our authors and dedicated readership.

Dr Celia Lam
Editor-in-Chief
25 July 2018

Documenting the (Un)official Kevin Carter Narrative: Encyclopedism, Irrealism, and Intimization in *House of Leaves*

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Abstract

Mark Z. Danielewski extends his critique of reliability – to the "destabilization" of "center" and "origin" and "totality" that Derrida famously exposes in "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences" in 1966 – to all of *House of Leaves*' paratexts, even to the narratives readers traditionally approach non-ironically or -critically, like the copyright page, the index, the cover blurbs, and the footnotes. Danielewski's much-studied encyclopedic 2000 novel features a *mise-en-abyme* of competing "narrators," thus compelling readers to encounter every text in and about the main text with critical suspicion. This unconventional, formal remove, however, is apparent to any reader who simply thumbs through Danielewski's text. Paradoxically, beneath this deconstructionist instability, the novel is anchored in a form of stability, namely connection. Protagonist Will Navidson is a Pulitzer Prize-winning photo-journalist and documentary filmmaker modelled on actual Pulitzer Prize-winner (and 1994 suicide) Kevin Carter. At stake here is how Danielewski blurs classical boundaries between fact and fiction, between reality and its reportage, in order to reclaim a modernist centre based on "readerly" identification. Danielewski's encyclopedia of the famous Carter photograph comes to un-complicate the complicated subject positions post-structuralism first exposed. Speaking to this un-complication of complication by way of the irrealism and intimization that recent documentary theory propounds, the article considers *House of Leaves* as a case study about belief. Realism, which documentary theory shows is all about artifice, has no affective bearing on belief. Belief, Danielewski illustrates, can transcend binaries like official-unofficial and fiction-nonfiction.

Keywords: *House of Leaves*, documentary, deconstruction, paratexts, remediation, irrealism, readerly identification

> A second set of critics were cleverer than the first: they identified a genuine paradox in the modern routine of documentation, which claims to require that one prove both that each sentence is original and that it has a source.
>
> (Grafton 1997: 143)

> […] a tension between evidentiality and aestheticization, accommodated in a much-debated balance in John Grierson's famous phrase 'the creative treatment of actuality.'
>
> (Rotha qtd. in Austin 2007: 88)

> At the conclusion of the Bangladesh war, photographers in Dacca were invited to a 'photo opportunity' in a polo field. It turned out to be a bayonetting of Biharis who were alleged to have collaborated with the Pakistani army… People were to be murdered for the camera; and some photographers and television camera crew departed without taking a picture in the hope that in the absence of cameramen the acts might not be committed. Others felt that the mob was beyond the appeal to mercy. They stayed and won Pulitzer prizes. Were they right?
>
> (Evans qtd. in Gross, Katz, and Ruby qtd in Chapman 2009: 166)

This article aims to move past poststructural politicization of the effects of paratextuality on the orders of information and the self. I do not stop at problematizing official narratives, something the deconstructionists, extending de Saussure, inaugurated in the 1960s. Certainly, my analysis celebrates unofficial narratives as it questions the blurred boundary between the two most general genre distinctions: "fiction" and "nonfiction." However, I also apply theories from recent work in documentary and documentary audience studies. I do so in hopes of un-complicating "truth" in order to enhance "reader" identification. (I use "reader" interchangeably with spectator, audience, and/or viewer here.) Ohad Landesman sees readerly identification as a "practice[e] of looking [that] can move beyond detached observation" (2015, p. 16). Thomas Austin considers the audience attachment that documentary furnishes as a process of "confronting, re-imagining, and grappling with a new, less complacent sense of self" (2009, p. 181). This documentary-motivated sense of association, Landesman writing elsewhere, marks "The urgent need to make a sharp distinction between documentary and fiction [a]s only a futile academic exercise that trivializes [a] film and its effects" (2008, p. 41). Landesman attests that "genre cannot reveal an a priori self-evident truth, and should therefore assert a more relative veracity by exercising strategies of fiction and exploiting the grey area between story and fact" (p. 43). "Truth," Jane Chapman correspondingly stresses in *Issues in Contemporary Documentary*, "isn't guaranteed by style or expression. It isn't guaranteed by anything" (Morris as cited in Chapman, 2009, p. 24).

Non-guaranteed "truth" coupled with connection could be the lede of Mark Z. Danielewski's much-studied encyclopedic novel *House of Leaves* (2001). After (or before) all, one of the four

back cover blurbs, attributed to *Time Out New York*, reads "A love story by a semiotician. Danielewski has a songwriter's heart as attuned to heartache as he is to Derrida's theory of the sign." Key to my complication of official narratives as characterized in *House of Leaves* is my close, reflexive reading of the novel's Kevin Carter paratext. At once echoing the complex literary strategies of *House of Leaves* and the critical ones of deconstruction, I take into account and apply postmodernist concepts like reflexivity, reliability, and remediation. *And* key to my un-complication of these deconstructive complications is the new application of documentary studies to the wide swathe of scholarly studies on *House of Leaves*. My goal is to provide a new angle on postmodernism and the representation of "truth" in *House of Leaves*. In some ways going against the Derridean spirit of postructuralism, which eschews more traditional/modernist conceits like origin, centre, and totality, documentary theory enables me to anchor the context of my particular reading of *House of Leaves*, and the Kevin Carter paratext(s) most specifically.

Paratextuality highlights a paradigmatic shift in the construction and analysis of literature *qua* literature, not to mention genre *qua* genre, and stages a textual shift that dismantles the mastertext of narratorial identity and order. Paratexts are Chinese-box narratives – or narrative "boxes" of graduated "size." Sometimes narrative boxes fit into others. At other times, they appear not to, thereby destabilizing traditional notions of chronology, order, and privilege. Paratexts complicate traditional storytelling by interrupting or obfuscating a more "central" narrative with additional material by critics, editors, publishers, etcetera. But a mere glance at *House of Leaves* and its unconventional structure makes this so-called complication immediately apparent to savvy readers.

At stake in this discursive study of an edited novel about a partial manuscript about an apocryphal documentary about a haunted house owned by a man based on Kevin Carter is adducing challenges to authorship, truth, and trust – and in some ways solving them, especially if *House of Leaves* is read through the lens of "the phenomenon referred to as the 'democratization of documentary'" (Chapman, 2009, p. 3). Danielewski's novel first complicates "reality" by critiquing the reliable remediation of information. We can therefore apply the documentary term "irrealism" to *House of Leaves*. According to MacLennan and Hookham, the term speaks to how "emphasis on the mediating properties of the film [is] such that reality itself [is] called into question" (as cited in Chapman, 2009, p. 21). As we learn from Dziga Vertov's 1929 "documentary" *Man with a Video Camera*, where we see a filmmaker filming, then an editor cutting, then the audience viewing their filmed and edited selves, there is no "unimpeded access to reality" (Nichols as cited in Chapman, p. 121). We see the same process in the documentary *Derrida*, not only when Derrida himself watches himself being interviewed, but also when he comments on how whatever he's filmed doing will come, anecdotally, to define him (Dick & Ziering Kofman, 2002). "[I]n respect to the proximity of the fiction film to reality," it is useful to recall André Bazin's "famous claim that 'realism in art can only be achieved in one way—through artifice'." (Bazin, as cited in Landesman, 2008, p. 37)

The deconstructive *mises-en-abyme* that Danielewski makes a virtue of in *House of Leaves* revisit how we read what we read – and how we connect with what we read. The narratorial instability of *House of Leaves*, alongside Kevin Carter's at once literal and figurative narrative presence (Danielewski's diegetic "Editors" make plain that the "fictional" Navidson is an alternate or possible still-living version of the "nonfictional" Kevin Carter) enhances the text's value as a journalistic and artistic experience. And lying beneath the superficial complication that Danielewski's unstable narratorial deferral introduces is a serious sense of what Lizbet van

Zoonen termed "intimization" at the beginning of the 1990s reality television boom (qtd. in Austin, 2007, p. 93). But *House of Leaves* belies the "compassion-fatigue" (Chapman, 2009, p. 33) that van Zoonen's apt pathological coinage suggested. At first diegetically, and then non-diegetically (through the myriad Web 2.0 reader-responses the novel provokes), *House of Leaves* offers alternate "speaking positions." Austin reminds us that "Debates about the politics of speaking positions and the impossibility of speaking beyond them emerged as part of the major epistemological shift associated with the post-structuralist turn in humanities and (some areas of) the social sciences" (2009, p. 3). "Middle-classness," Austin later stresses, "has remained largely unmarked, naturalized in countless ways, an invisible centre at the heart of most academics' social identities" (p. 111). Early in *House of Leaves* readers recognize through the novel's unconventional form and its unconventional narrative paratexts that Danielewski is exposing and deconstructing his own always-already flawed, multi-dimensional role. Akin to a documentary filmmaker, to appropriate Chapman, Danielewski is at once "discoverer, observer, inventor of approach and form, [and] composer of style" (2009, p. 4). Danielewski also ironically deconstructs his/the given (academic) middle-class speaking position through the personage of narrator Johnny Truant, himself also a version of photo-journalist Kevin Carter.

Even before our current social networking era, *House of Leaves* challenged now-dated modernist reading strategies: later footnotes in the text return readers to "previous" ones; endnotes appear "relatively early" in the circuitous novel; and a specious bibliography is inserted around the novel's more conventionally delineated "one-quarter" point. Plus, the novel challenges "traditional linear reading" because *House of Leaves* is replete with footnotes, footnotes to footnotes, barely sketched, much-less elaborated, exhibits, appendices that are complete, incomplete, or resting somewhere in between (due to editorial omission, or ~~sometimes intentional~~ redaction, caused by ink stains, coffee spillages, the over-folding of appended rough notes to the point of expurgation, and numerous other detriti of modern time, error, and care), *and* an index that challenges standard academic understandings of indices.[1]

Integral to my discussion is Danielewski's reflexive writerly *mise-en-abyme*. *House of Leaves* is about a much (in-text) commented-upon Direct Cinema documentary called *The Navidson Record*, directed by the (in text) fictional character Will Navidson, a Pulitzer Prize-winning photographer of lasting repute inspired upon actual (or extra-textual) Pulitzer Prize-winner, and 1994 suicide, Kevin Carter. But we, the readers, obviously do not literally see or view *The Navidson Record*, nor do the plethora of (in-text) fictional and nonfictional academics, celebrities, and researchers who comment upon the apocryphal auteur "cult" film. Nor does Zampanò (who is the original, though dead, author-collector of the disorganized manuscript eponymously titled "The Navidson Record") see the film *The Navidson Record*. To reiterate, Zampanò does not view the documentary film he purportedly critiques in exhaustive detail; his diligence includes referencing a plethora of other articles and monographs about *The Navidson Record*, one measuring 4000 pages! Zampanò indeed cannot view *The Navidson Record*. Not unlike his encyclopedic anxiety-of-influence producing literary precursors, ranging from the

[1] It can be helpful to situate Danielewski and his amalgamation of deferred encyclopedic annotation and stylistic innovation in a literary tradition that includes the paratextuality of J.J. Abram's and Doug Dorst's *S.* (2012), the limitlessness of Rebecca Solnit's *Infinite City* (2010), the unreliability of Junot Diaz' *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007), the underworld impasses of Paul Auster's *Oracle Night* (2004), the logorrhea of David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest* (1996), the meticulousness of Nicholson Baker's *The Mezzanine* (1986), the telegraphic reportage of Renata Adler's *Speedboat* (1978), the meta-textuality of Vladimir Nabokov's *Pale Fire* (1962), the high-modernist detail of James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1921, 1993) and *Finnegans Wake* (1939, 1976)… and the serious play of Laurence Sterne's *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (1759, 1988).

blind Homer, to the blind Milton, to the blind Joyce, to the reflexive cycloptic-by-*House of Leaves*'-end main character Will Navidson, old man Zampanò is blind. And since Zampanò is the narrator *manqué* as soon as the novel opens, readers receive his work-in-progress as seen through the editing and editorializing eyes of the ironically named, and perhaps John Fante-inspired, Johnny Truant, an unreliable drug-addled tattoo apprentice irreparably traumatized by his young life as an abused orphan.

Johnny Truant readily admits to, and even boasts about, changing textual details, and readily interjects into what readers encounter as the novel *House of Leaves* with long, personalized footnotes. Some of these paratextual apparatuses are at-best tangentially related to what readers are to believe is originally presented in Zampanò's untidy manuscript "The Navidson Record." Furthermore, anonymous "Editors" also intervene in *House of Leaves* to correct or qualify the remarks of Johnny Truant. As readers, we too are often hailed into the text: Johnny addresses us as "you" in his frequent literary and nonliterary excursions. As an extension of this paratextual deferral from (the idea of) the novel's central plot, it proves unbearable, at least for this readerly interlocutor, not to make marginal notes, not to haunt the text that is constantly in the process of being supplemented by competing innovation and intervention. This interpellation into the deferral process subverts objectivity – or unfiltered truth – by eliciting readerly participation and care in a way that echoes the subjective involvements of Johnny, Zampanò, and Navidson.

Protagonist Will Navidson's fame originally derives not from his auto-ethnography *The Navidson Record*, but from his Pulitzer Prize-winning photo "of a dying girl in Sudan" (Danielewski, 2000, p. 6). This notoriety is first pointed out in the novel at several degrees of remove: "photographers in the news community" recognize him as "the prize-winning photojournalist" (pp. 5–6). Danielewski's "Index" to *House of Leaves* includes a concordance of seven-pages – "xxi, 6, 333, 368, 392, 394, 419" (p. 693) – whereupon Navidson's well-known photograph is mentioned. Already influenced by the unconventional look of the novel, readers approach said "Index" with warranted suspicion. Given the creative constraints of memory and the exhaustive breadth and depth of *House of Leaves*, however, we critical readers are compelled to read the "Index" as a more-or-less reliable industry-standard index. Danielewski's index is, after all, one of the numerous framing texts (or what Gérard Genette has coined as paratexts in *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* (1987)) of *House of Leaves*, a text so replete with paratexts that locating a more modernist central text could prove problematic or strategically redundant. This returns me to Landesman's point about "futile academic exercises" (2008, p. 41). Applying Chapman's appraisal of "Fictional techniques" when it comes to the definition of documentary can un-complicate this poststructural complication and politicization of "centre." After quoting Michael Renov's point that "Fiction is oriented towards *a* world, non-fiction towards *the* world" (as cited in Chapman, 2009, p. 15), Chapman reminds us that "it is not necessary to see the difference between fact and fiction as an either/or" (p. 15). "Roscoe and Hight", Chapman continues, "prefer to see documentary as 'existing along a fact-fictional continuum, each text constructing relationships with both factual and fictional discourses'" (pp. 15–16). In Danielewski's novel about an apocryphal documentary by a fictionalized version of a non-fictional Pulitzer Prize-winning photojournalist, truth is not – cannot be – merely an "either/or."

House of Leaves is a(n endless) labyrinth of competing paratexts, or secondary and tertiary texts, all of which arrest attention from a sustained focus on any main narrative, thereby problematizing more conventional ways of reading fiction and nonfiction while simultaneously obfuscating (or, better, rendering futile) the fiction-nonfiction dialectic. Footnote 1 above

briefly delineates the canon with which *House of Leaves* keeps (experimental) company. Given how these texts and others like them embrace the conventions of both fiction and criticism, we can characterize such work as critifiction. And if "critifiction," in the style of Danielewski, Pynchon, Nabokov, and Joyce, why not "ficticism?" Though I'll keep said genre blending and bending to a minimum, it is important to stress that *House of Leaves* scholarship tends to imitate the very paratextual apparatuses that *House of Leaves* is known for. Michael Hemmingson, for instance, makes his Danielewski-inspired self-reflexive ficticism patent in one of his 20-plus endnotes: "The reader will take notice that, emulating *House of Leaves*, I am using footnotes within footnotes, which is often frowned upon in the academic community – that is, for the critic to take on the style of the work under scrutiny" (2011, p. 285). (Also see *House of Leaves* "ficticism" scholarship by Aghoro, 2012; Askin, 2012; Belletto, 2009; Bemong, 2003; Cox, 2006; Chanen, 2007; Dawson, 2012; Greve, 2012; Hagood, 2012; Hansen, 2004; Hayles, 2002; Huber, 2012; Jones, 2004; Letzler, 2012; Shastri, 2006; Slocombe, 2005; Söder, 2012; Taylor, 2013; and Toth, 2013. Admittedly, many, but not all, of these are collected in Polhman's edited volume *Revolutionary Leaves* [2012]. It is evident that Danielewski's fictional critique of conventional scholarship has come to influence conventional scholarship.)

In *House of Leaves* it is in the Editors' footnote 336 (we know it's the intervention of the editors not only because it's followed, as is the novel's convention, by "—Ed," but because these Editors write in Century Schoolbook font, whereas Zampanò does in Times New Roman, and Johnny in `Courier`) that readers first encounter an overt reference to Kevin Carter. The "Editors" plainly remind readers of the extra-textual nonfictional source of Navidson's award-winning photo, thereby ironically inscribing or framing their editorial selves as ordinary and reliable superintendents of certainty: "This is clearly based on Kevin Carter's 1994 Pulitzer Prize-winning photograph of a vulture preying on a tiny Sudanese girl who collapsed on her way to a feeding center. Carter enjoyed many accolades for the shot but was also accused of gross insensitivity" (Danielewski, 2000, p. 368). The Editors continue with a quotation they attribute to The Florida St. Petersburg *Times*, which apparently noted that "the man adjusting his lens to take just the right frame of her suffering might just as well be a predator, another vulture on the scene" (p. 368). The Editors then "Regrettably" conclude that "constant exposure to violence and deprivation, coupled with an increased dependency on drugs exacted a high price. On July 27, 1994 Carter killed himself" (p. 368).

Danielewski's punctilious Editors source this information (and heavily so; and sans attribution) from Scott Macleod's piece "The Life and Death of Kevin Carter," originally published in *Time* in September 1994. The 3000-word report speaks to the "acclaim" and "critical focus" accompanying the fame associated to Carter's Pulitzer. Macleod details the publicly questioned veracity of the famous photograph: "Some journalists in South Africa called his prize a 'fluke,' alleging that he had somehow set up the tableau. Others questioned his ethics. "The man adjusting his lens to take just the right frame of her suffering," said the St. Petersburg (Florida) Times [sic], 'might just as well be a predator, another vulture on the scene'" (n.p.). Macleod goes on to lament that "Even some of Carter's friends wondered aloud why he had not helped the girl" (Macleod, 1994, n.p.).

For a better understanding of Navidson, who, like Johnny Truant, is a "fictional" extension of the "nonfictional" Carter, it's worth quoting the bulk of the final paragraph of Macleod's article:

> The suicide note [Carter] left behind is a litany of nightmares and dark visions, a clutching attempt at autobiography, self-analysis, explanation, excuse. After coming

> home from New York, he wrote, he was "depressed… without phone… money for rent… money for child support… money for debts… money!!!... I am haunted by the vivid memories of killings & corpses & anger & pain… of starving or wounded children, of trigger-happy madmen, often police, of killer executioners…" (1994, n.p.)

An unsettling irony is how the reproduced suicide note that Macleod prefaces as a "litany of nightmares" itself contains a litany of ellipses, elisions that beg questions of authorship and omission. Are these truncations in Carter's original note? Or did Macleod insert them? If the former, they might be read as expressions of exasperation, fatigue, surrender, and/or threat. If the latter, if the ellipses are indeed inserted by Macleod, which is plausible given that he describes the note as "a clutching attempt at autobiography, self-analysis, explanation, excuse," readers might wonder what Macleod may have strategically dis-included from his article, and why he may have done so. Certainly, we could ask him, or could have asked him closer to the time of his article published nearly twenty-five years ago. But how reliable might those answers have been? Whom, colleague or confidante, friend or adversary, might he, should he, could he be, protecting? Or, rather, protecting himself from – this particularly in light of the journalist's emphasis on the journalistic reality/wisdom/necessity of "bond[ing] with gun-toting street warriors" that prove so pervasive in the townships of civil war-torn South Africa in the early 1990s (1994, n.p.).

A related question, one that continues to speak to the Derridean (endless) deferral of information Danielewski uses to complicate authority and centrality, concerns the source of Macleod's own procurement of the Carter suicide note. Was it already redacted? Did *Time*'s legal counsel dictate to Macleod what he could (not) say? In other words, even if we requested these details from the journalist, he may not be able to answer. Maybe the death is suspicious? Perhaps an investigation into Carter's death is still extant at the time of the *Time* publication in early autumn 1994. Perhaps something related or reminiscent to the Carter suicide occurs in Macleod's circle of friends or associates in the over month-long interim between the Carter death and the article about Carter's death. Or maybe Macleod's memory is flawed? Or his imagination is overactive? Or a statute of limitations on information dissemination endures or is about to be inaugurated? My point is that a host of intangibles can surface between any given event and the reportage of that event. So much also depends upon who reports on any given event – and upon the details the reporter pursues, the (un)official narratives she privileges, and the (un)official narratives she constructs, critiques, and/or counteracts. Landesman, of course, would view this line of questioning as mere academic quibbling – or worse. Truth in representation, realist or not, documentary or not, is not about so-called accuracy. Quoting Nichols, Chapman contends that "the central space documentary occupies is located in 'the gap between life as lived and life as narrativized'" (2009, p. 6). What Danielewski does in *House of Leaves* is illustrate this "gap." In so doing, he exposes the danger of (post-structural) theoretical remove.

Speaking to this theoretical danger, *House of Leaves* includes what we should perceive to be a Carter-modelled non-redacted letter, one that integrates, to reiterate, "a clutching attempt at autobiography, self-analysis, explanation, excuse" (Macleod, 1994, n.p.). The letter is crafted by the contrite and drunken Pulitzer Prize-winning Carter-modelled photojournalist Will Navidson. The photographer and filmmaker's illuminating and ironically exacting epistle also addresses one of the principal mysteries of Danielewski's text. The first half of page three of the five-page missive—a missive dated "March 31, 1991" (Danielewski, 2000, p. 389), two in-text years before Kevin Carter's real prize-winning photo was actually snapped – is worth reproducing, *sic erat scriptum* inclusive, with original *House of Leaves* spacing preserved.

> it. I miss you. I miss you. I won't reread this.
> If I do I'll throw it away and write something
> terse, clean and sober. And all locked up.
> You know me so so well. I know you'll strip
> out the alcohol fumes, the fear, the mistakes,
> and see what matters—a code to decipher
> written by a guy who thought he was
> speaking clearly. I'm crying now. I don't
> think I can stop. But if I try to stop I'll stop
> writing and I know I won't start again. I miss
> you so much. I miss Daisy. I miss Chad. I
> miss Wax and Jed. I even miss Holloway.
> ~~And I miss Hansen and Latigo and PFC~~
> ~~Miserette, Benton and Carl and Regio and 1st~~
> ~~lieutenant Nacklebend and of course Zips~~
> and now I can't get Delial out of my head.
> Delial, Delial, Delial—the name I gave to the
> girl in the photo that wonme all the fame and
> gory, that's all she is Karen, just the photo. (Danielewski, 2000, p. 391)

Even the ostensibly simple duplication of a portion of the letter addressed "My dearest Karen" (p. 389) and signed "Navy" (p. 393) resists reliable replication. Paper size, for one, invariably varies. The hard copy of *House of Leaves* from which the passage is for all intents and purposes faithfully copied is narrower and shorter than the A4 paper size upon which it is facsimiled by me. And perhaps my facsimile is now in the process of being read on 8½ x 11" dimensioned paper, or on the small screen of a smartphone, or the 42" screen of a monitor, or in the pages of a journal or magazine measuring, say, 6½ x 8". This is to say nothing of font type and size. Nor color. As a matter of fact, an obvious complication of transmission in the above is that the three American-War-in-Vietnam-referencing struck-through lines on page 391 are in red font, while the line crossing them out appears in black font in the copy of *House of Leaves* I am sourcing.

A seemingly and indicative question about this Derridean absent-presence, this conspicuousness by way of erasure, concerns the source of said editorial intervention: Navidson candidly exposing – or failing to expose? – something else he fails to expose/conceal? Zampanò preserving? Zampanò concealing? Johnny doing (n)either/(n)or? The Editors (not) doing the same? In the larger context, however, *House of Leaves* is replete with red-font text struck-through in black, a move indicated three times in three distinct ways on the copyright page of my edition of *House of Leaves*. To wit, for instance, "The word house in blue; minotaur and all ~~struck~~ passages in red" (iv). Once again, I did not, or could not, reproduce the blue and red of my source; albeit, perhaps with or without my (veto) knowledge this has been corrected, in which case you, or some of you, are not reading this. Furthermore (a furthermore that is likewise no longer present here if the previous sentence is silently removed), I added the Roman numeral (iv) to the copyright page by simply counting backwards from the first page of Johnny's "Introduction," which starts at xi. All in all, Danielewski extends his critique of reliability – to the "destabilization" of "center" and "origin" and "totality" Derrida first famously exposes in "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences" (1978) – to all of *House of Leaves*' paratexts, even, or most especially, to the very narratives readers traditionally approach non-ironically.

In brief, Danielewski compels his readers to encounter every text in and about his text with the critical suspicion and contingency that postmodernists and deconstructionists prize. When navigating *House of Leaves* it is prudent to bear in mind the principal thesis of Fish's *Is There a Text in this Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (1980): meaning is always already contextualized, always already shared by particular readers in particular shared spaces. The ostensibly apparent, or the apparently obvious, can change, thus obviating any stable sense of the unambiguous. So-called literal meanings, *tout court*, are unstable or provisional. This is all well and "true," but recent documentary studies tell us that communities, that readers and viewers, even from within increasingly balkanized (online) groups, crave connection and intimacy with the (artistic) products they consume – notwithstanding progressively more reflexive formal sophistication in "fiction," "nonfiction," and documentary alike. It's worth quoting Austin's quotation of Smith:

> The paradox is obvious: the cinemas, the places where previous generations hunkered down, suspended their disbelief and engaged in a communal dream, are to some extent becoming refuges from the relentless artifice, places where we can go to wake up, to find out what's really going on. Or at least to engage with stories and experiences in which we can believe. (as cited in Austin, 2007, p. 15).

Even as "the basic integrity of the camera as a *recording* instrument is fundamentally undermined (Roscoe & Hight as cited in Landesman, 2008, p. 35), audiences can experience cinema (and books) as correctives to the "relentless artifice" of the official narratives ceaselessly bombarding us. Mediation, here, is not the problem, nor is truth. Rather, belief, in the sense of affective and affecting, is.

"Having studied at Yale during the halcyon days of deconstruction," Mark C. Taylor notes, "Danielewski knows his literary theory inside out" (2013, p. 118). Continuing, Taylor likens Danielewski to a "precocious graduate student in literary theory [who] had written a demanding work of fiction that includes every possible interpretation of it that might be proffered by the professors sitting on his doctoral committee" (p. 119). Another one of Danielewski's theoretical problematizations extends to spatiality. Spacing *vis-à-vis* the reproduction of reality (or irrealism) is a complex issue in *House of Leaves*. Witness, for example, line 18 from page 391: "girl in the photo that wonme all the fame and." In my copy of *House of Leaves*, the "wonme" I have just reproduced appears more like a cross between "wonme' and "w o n m e," a spatial maneuver I am unable to imitate. I qualified the point just made with "[i]n my copy" because, so Josh Toth explains in an article's endnotes, "there is no definitive edition of *House of Leaves*, just variant 'versions'" (2013, p. 195). "For more on this," Toth continues, "see the interesting [though nonacademic] summary of these variants at the forum titled "Comprehensive Guide to printings/Editions/ISBNs etc" (p. 195).

Additionally, to continue this reflexive *mise-en-abyme*, had I included a longer reproduction of the Navidson letter above, say a block quotation requiring a page break, the gap I would have inserted between what I would have tried to imply is page 391 and page 392 would almost certainly be "artificial." Navidson does not leave spaces between the individual paragraphs of his letter. In two obvious cases, pages 390 and 392, his sentences carry over from one page to the next. These sentences either end in conventional full-stops or seemingly conclude in a drunken version of the Joycean spacing evident in the "Penelope" chapter of *Ulysses*, a 42-page closing without punctuation beyond the seven line breaks evinced by new, indented paragraphs (in Oxford's 1993 republication of "the original 1922 text," so the 1993 reissue of the novel's back cover blurb advertises at least in (Joyce, 1993)).

What my intended-for-readerly-clarification-addition-of-a-simple-space-between-two-pages also speaks to is the "original" letter's place in *House of Leaves* overall. The letter, "reproduce[d] in facsimile" (Danielewski, 2000, p. 388), appears in *The Navidson Record* documentary for "only a few seconds of screen time," so Zampanò's notes toward his manuscript "The Navidson Record" explain (p. 388). Three pages earlier, the Zampanò manuscript details where the researcher sources the Navidson letter, one that is not a suicide note like Kevin Carter's, but rather an apology and ostensible goodbye to his longtime partner Karen, whom Navidson is betraying by breaking his promise not to return to the shifting labyrinthine hallways of their house's basement, which has already claimed the lives of Navidson's brother Tom and two mountaineering experts hired to explore and map the cavernous basement's infinite gothic horrors.

Under the subtitle "**Why Did Navidson Go Back To The House?**," a question that is page-centered, in larger font than the text surrounding it, and with the word house in blue, Zampanò mentions "three schools of thought" that address Navidson's motivations for reentering the rural house (p. 384) that is discomfitingly bigger on the inside than it is on the outside. Incidentally, as my constant qualifications and remediations are meant to evoke, incidental subjects provoking additional encyclopedic investigation proliferate almost *ad infinitum* in *House of Leaves*. Let's return to the fact that the word house is always in blue. "House" in blue font functions like a hyperlink leading to evermore information – or to what David Letzler likens to "cruft," which is a "half-slang/half-technical term from technical programming" evoking that which is "excessive to no clear purpose, simultaneously too much and too little" (2012, p. 308). In whatever language "house" appears it is always in blue in *House of Leaves*, even on the cover (of my copy at least). The sole exception to this rule (in my copy) is the "Random House" indicated, under "Credits," as the publisher of the unnamed poem extracted from Hirshman and Aratami's *The Ink Dark Moon* (Danielewski, 2000, p. 708). I read and accept this (seemingly) sole house-in-blue anomaly as an intentional oversight, as yet another instance of the author's deconstruction of authority. I do not accept this intentional error simply because Danielewski claims in the interview "Haunted House" that "there are no errors in the book" (McCaffery & Gregory, 2003, p. 114) – which is a brilliant assertion since it's impossible to verify *a posteriori* – but instead because even the house in "Random House" and "www.randomhouse.com" indicated on the text's back cover appears in blue font.

House of Leaves readers, in other words, are forever encouraged to hunt the text, which includes its paratexts, for putative aberrations, thus evoking Navidson's explorations of his own property, a figurative and literal text/home that defies the customary limits of space, expectation, and navigation, not to mention any totalized sense of textual completion. Mapping the space of this haunted place always already entails the endless process of charting the actual and metaphorical extensions of its correlated spaces. Excursus, so Danielewski illustrates, compounds and confounds the encyclopedic drive for closure. Danielewski gave himself the task of writing the provisional encyclopedia of Kevin Carter's Pulitzer Prize-winning picture. He, however, does not do this merely as a post-structural exercise. I contend that he does so at least partly because he's aware, to appropriate Chapman, that "Documentaries and photographs can supplement or replace oral history as a means of providing continuity and a sense of community" (2009, p. 5). Danielewski seems to have anticipated the return to character identification that occurred in the early 2000s, a reinvestment in character that has variously been called late-postmodernism, post-postmodernism, or new conventionalism. With his interests in theory, film, fiction, and "reality," and his finger on the pulse of emerging official media and reality TV cultures, Danielewski appeared aware that "[cinema] [would] no longer [be] an indexical media technology but rather a subgenre of painting" (Manovich as cited in

Landesman, 2008, pp. 34–35). At the heart of Danielewski's theoretical novel about writing, documentary, photography, and the possible worlds of the late Kevin Carter is an investment in the art, commitment, and care that determine our everyday experience of the (artificial) reality/realism in the making all around us.

The last time that the "Navidson" Pulitzer Prize is mentioned, so Danielewski's "Index" reminds us, is on page 419. What surrounds the mention of the award concerns the wider contextualization(s) that any single artistic instant ought to entail:

> Consider for the last time the image that won [Navidson] the Pulitzer Prize. Not even taking into account the courage necessary to travel to Sudan, walk the violent, disease-infested streets, and finally discover the child in some rocky patch of earth—all of which some consider a major part of photography and even art—Navidson also had to contend with the infinite number of ways he could photograph her (angles, filters, focus, framing, lighting, etc., etc.) He could have used up a dozen rolls exploring these possibilities, but he did not. He shot her once and in only one way. (Danielewski, 2000, pp. 419-20).

In order to continue this dilation of ekphrasis, which in this case is the expansive treatment of a single, photographic image to encyclopedic discursive embellishment, let me turn to another Zampanò paragraph. It follows the one quoted just above:

> In the photograph, the vulture sits behind Delial, frame left, slightly out of focus, primary feathers beginning to feel the air as it prepares for flight. Near the centre, in crisp focus squats Delial, bone dangling in her tawny almost inhuman fingers, her lips a crawl of insects, her eyes swollen with sand. Illness and hunger are on her but Death is still a few paces behind, perched on a rocky mound, talons fully extended, black eyes focused on Famine's daughter. (p. 420)

Whether or not these two quoted paragraphs are historically "accurate" in terms of process and product, meaning photographer and photograph, meaning the actual and its remediation, is beside the point. What matters is Navidson and Delial's instantaneous visceral – and hauntingly eternal – connection.

The chapter containing these quoted passages is one of the shortest in *House of Leaves*. Chapter XIX, of a total XXIII (not including almost 200 pages of additional material: exhibits, appendices, etc.), begins with the following Susan Sontag epigram (from page 97) of *On Photography*: "*Contrary to what Weston asserts, the habit of photographic seeing—of looking at reality as an array of potential photographs—creates estrangement from, rather than union with, nature*" (as cited in Danielewski, 2000, p. 418). A handful of pages later, Zampanò includes another selection from Sontag's *On Photography*, this one a critical reading of the prized photo that gestures toward connection in lieu of estrangement: "Her proximity suggested to us that Delial was still within our reach" (as cited in Danielewski, 2000, p. 421). This closeness, this touchableness, is Sontag's response to the fact that in the photo, as Zampanò explains, "Delial is not exactly in the centre. She is closer to Navidson, and hence to the observer, by a hair" (p. 421). The same page of Zampanò's includes this "diagram" –

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– surrounded by a substantial amount of empty space, as my (compromised) simulacrum of the bottom half of 421 illustrates. The missing diagram supposedly evidenced what Zampanò called the "political consequences" of the "photograph's composition" based on the observer's proximity to its off-centre, "by a hair," subject (p. 421).

Footnote 416, appended directly to the absent diagram, provides an instructive excuse for the misplaced data: "Presumably Zampanò's blindness prevented him from providing an actual diagram of the Delial photograph. — Ed" (p. 421). Ironic, here, is the Editors' tellingly naïve dismissal of meticulousness based solely on the fact that Zampanò is blind. The texts' original conceit, we recall, is that *House of Leaves* itself is initially compiled from the dead Zampanò's own extensive manuscript, a document with a title duplicating that of the documentary film it academically assesses. "The Navidson Record" is a critical study of *The Navidson Record*. Illustrative is the fact that Zampanò's blindness, coupled with Johnny Truant's editing (and editorializing), and the Editors' emendations, not to mention any reader's own misreading, is the unreliability of authority in this composite text. And the fact that this speculative hairsplitting ultimately doesn't alter the suffering that readers witness/experience as they attach themselves to Johnny's attachment to Zampanò's attachment to Navidson's attachment to Delial. As Elaine Scarry suggests in "The difficulty of imagining other persons," to appropriate Austin's appropriation of her article, "art can facilitate 'the imaginative labor of knowing "the other,"' overcoming the relative poverty of mental imagining to 'achieve the vivacity of the perceptual world'" (Scarry as cited in Austin, 2007, p. 179).

Note 2 of Will Slocombe's "'This is not for you': Nihilism and the House that Jacques Built" confronts this same "problem of 'remediation'" (2005, p. 106). Slocombe's title and subtitle are themselves palimpsests of remediation. "This is not for you" is the undocumented epigram to Johnny's 14-page "**Introduction**" to a book Johnny comes to ambiguously title *The Navidson Record* (Danielewski, 2000, p. 1). Slocombe's subtitle, among other things, appears to address the text's *Time Out New York*-attributed back-cover blurb – that is, the abovementioned "A love story by a semiotician. Danielewski has a songwriter's heart as attuned to heartache as he is to Derrida's theory of the sign." On the surface, the blurb addresses the Derridean theory permeating/directing the text's theoretical paratexts. It likewise nods towards Derrida himself appearing "in character" in Karen's short film "**What Some Have Thought**," a companion piece to her absent film "**A Brief History of Who I Love**." Zampanò's blindness, Slocombe avers, "raises the question of how Zampanò watched the video and was able to offer a reading of 'The Navidson Record.' This is yet another example of the problem of 'remediation' inherent within *House of Leaves*" (2005, p. 106). The problem of remediation, however, is not the principal issue in Danielewski's first novel. Love is. (Jacques) Derrida's very brief two-part conversation with Karen at an "Artaud exhibit" centres on the word "other," a word/concept he repeats six times in but a handful of short sentences (Danielewski, 2000, pp.

361, 365). Derrida's own personal story of "love," so we learn in the documentary *Derrida*, is not something the father of deconstruction is willing to discuss; he knows that the remediation of his talking about his love always already reduces intimacy to the echoes of anecdote (Dick & Ziering Kofman, 2002).

Before concluding, or to conclude, allow me to address another illustrative reliability/reality/realism conundrum in *House of Leaves*. Footnote 415 is attributed to "Zampanò"'s "original" manuscript, a footnote chronologically preceding the Editors' guileless conclusion about why a certain diagram is "[p]resumably" absent. In footnote 415, Sontag's pithy comments on Delial are attributed to "p. 394" of "*The Revised Edition*" of "*On Photography*," a book purportedly published by "(Anchor Books, 1996)" (Danielewski, 2000, p. 421). This 1996 remediation of *On Photography*, however, does not exist. Sontag's 200-page essay collection *On Photography*, which won the National Critic Book's Circle Award for Criticism in 1977 – 18 years before the "Delial" photo! – has no revised edition, and was last reissued (if I can trust my searches and sources) by Anchor in 1990.

Readers are therefore compelled both to trust and to distrust the scholarly gestures of *House of Leaves*, and by extension the real world it at once fictionalizes and emulates. The first Sontag quotation, the epigram opening Chapter XIX, is genuine; it exists beyond *House of Leaves*. The second one does not. Yet within the province of *House of Leaves*, the quotation very well *can* be genuine. Fictional representation allows for, even requires, the overlap of the "authentic" and the "inauthentic" – or perhaps it is better to phrase this visible palimpsest, this overlapping of the fictional and the nonfictional, as the commingling of real(ist) world(s) and possible ones. Susan Sontag quotations tellingly frame Chapter XIX. Chapter XIX in a later list in *House of Leaves* is attributed the "**Possible Chapter Titl[e]**" "Delial" (Danielewski, 2000, p. 540). And not unlike the representative Delial photo, the composition of this chapter, a composition that is poetic/literary in lieu of photographic/visual in this case, proves to be off-center. Even with Zampanò's diagram conspicuously absent, other words follow the second "Sontag" "quotation" (which we scare quote from without the possible world of *House of Leaves*, but should represent as a Sontag quotation sans rhetorical remove within said world). The framing technique, therefore, is artificial. Or maybe a preferable description is imperfect? Or, this even more demonstratively, is impossible?

To perform ekphrasis, to describe the central action of a painting or a photo, to dilate upon a climax experienced in a single glimpse, is to engage in by-definition endless encyclopedic embellishment. Neither the limits, nor the centre, can hold. More points/questions about these putative limits and debatable centres can likewise be theorized in relation to the second "Sontag quotation"/Sontag quotation. Maybe the "quotation"/quotation actually anachronistically originates in Sontag's coda and corrective to *On Photography*, that is, her 2003 book *Regarding the Pain of Others*. If the "quotation"/quotation does (come to) originate in *Regarding the Pain of Others*, rather than in *On Photography*, is this due to editorial "error" on the part of Danielewski's "Editors"? or Danielewski's narrator "Johnny"? or Johnny's source "Zampanò"? or Danielewski's actual publisher Pantheon? Or is this "error" not an "error" at all? Or perhaps the so-called "error" really is a comment on the usefulness of indices in "nonfictional texts"? After all, Sontag herself (or is it her editor[s]? or her publisher?) refuses to append indices to both *On Photography* and its follow-up, leaving assiduous or enthusiastic *House of Leaves* extra- and intra-text readers to (re)read the 100-plus-page *Regarding the Pain of Others* in hopes of encountering an at least similar comment on the Kevin Carter photo – a comment that might counteract or at least complicate what comes to be Sontag's thesis concerning how violent images desensitize their audiences. Danielewski's encyclopedic

treatment of the photographer of a famous photo, after all, is a complex, haunting, exercise in exorcising the spectacular from photographic experience. Because of Danielewski's ekphrastic deferrals we intimately invest not only in Delial, but also in Carter – and the narrators/characters who intimately invest in them.

But maybe in the world of *House of Leaves* the Sontag coda is different from the one extant in the world beyond *House of Leaves*. Therefore, both Sontag texts could in fact have indices in the world of *House of Leaves*. Yet what if these indices are incomplete or misguided or (un)intentionally obfuscating? Or perhaps in the world of *House of Leaves*, the first Sontag quotation is spurious and the second genuine? or the opposite is true? or neither is genuine? or both are?

Obvious extensions of Danielewski's complications of the transmission of reliable information in the real world are legion. Consider, for example, global, historical who's who*s* like JFK, Oswald, and J. Edgar Hoover, three American figures epitomizing the image, information, and disinformation that have so consumed and defined middle-class academic subjects since the 1960s, when the conventions of social reality and order and agency were overturned. But who's who? Don DeLillo's Hoover in *Underworld* (1997) or James Ellroy's in The Underworld USA Trilogy (1995, 2001, 2009) or Clint Eastwood's in *J Edgar* (2011)? Which Oswald? DeLillo's in *Libra* (1988), Stephen King's in *11/22/63* (2011), Gerald Posner's in *Case Closed* (1993), Norman Mailer's in *Oswald's Tale* (1995) … or Vincent Bugliosi's in *Four Days in November*? (2007). Or who's JFK do we invest in: Schlesinger's in *A Thousand Days* (1965); or Oliver Stone's in *JFK* (1991); or Christopher Hitchens' in "In Sickness and by Stealth" (2003)? How can we access a non-politicized, non-remediated version of these historical subjects – or is a better, a *truer*, word "characters"? Plus, what is this ability we have to utter and *believe* in truer truths if we don't believe in unmediated truth? If everything is indeed contingent, how can we even say that everything is a contingency? It seems we are somehow logically capable of investing into that which we cannot invest into. How can I disbelieve in any notion of truth, when that very disbelief necessitates a belief in falsity? Even the claim everything is false posits itself as a truth. So what do we privilege, de we trust, de we (re)present?

In returning to the issue of *House of Leaves* and its main focus on endless deferral and reliability, can we not make the claim that the apocryphal film *The Navidson Record* does exist? It exists in the same fashion as the fictional Hamlet, Rosalind, The Ancient Mariner, and Bartleby yet at one extra level of remove or mediation. A more useful illustration, perhaps, is to understand the absent in-text *Navidson Record* in light of other perennially absent characters – and in fact never fictionally represented beyond anecdote. Think of Godot in Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* (1956), of Charlie from the TV series *Charlie's Angels* (1976-81), and of Vera from TV's *Cheers* (1982-93). These characters, or examples of presence through in-text absence, exist in our "fiction"-informed imaginaries. They exist in similar ways to the notorious Witches in Puritan New England, to Orson Welles' Alien Invaders in the radio drama era, to the infamous Reds in the Cold War imaginary, and to the pervasive Sex Rings and Satanic Cults in America's sensationalist 1980s. All of the above are characters or readerly-invested processes that find their bases, their creations and their credibility, however long- or short-lived, in "the art of fiction" – which we recall Bazin roughly described as the necessary artifice of realism (as cited in Chapman, 2009, p. 37). Danielewski's *House of Leaves* reflects upon how fiction, or what Derrida would call myth, determines so-called fact. Whether or not the characters in *House of Leaves* literally see the in-text fictional or in-text nonfictional documentary *The Navidson Record*, readers of the novel do "see" the film, do in fact experience a viewing of the film, precisely because they/we are provided with detailed readings and

counter-readings of the film. This *mise-en-abyme* of mediation (of endlessly deferred remediation) endows *The Navidson Record* with existence, with actuality. In regarding the pain of others, in investing in the reality of others, we connect. In connecting, the suspension of disbelief transforms into belief itself. For readers, for viewers, for audiences, for (cultural) subjects, connection can bridge – can belie – the theoretical divide between realism and "reality."

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Reality of Trap: Trap Music and its Emancipatory Potential

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Abstract:

The reality that has been presented in rap music and its celebrity culture has always been connected with two extremes: the reality of the "thug" life of the streets on the one hand and with a specific sort of "American Dream" reality that presents climbing from bottom to top on the other hand. This article explores the reasons why trap music, which originated as a type of rap music in the south of the USA, is now with its specific mixture of hedonism and nihilism, darkness and joy, becoming the music of our times. It argues that this is not a coincidence: the two-fold reality, the cruel reality of living "in a trap" on the one hand and the idealized, dreamy reality full of gold and diamonds on the other hand, is the main allegory of "real" life in late capitalism. How to get out of the trap? In the article, I investigate some crucial problems of contemporary theory regarding class and racial differences and argue that we can extract far-reaching social, political, and theoretical statements through interpretation of music that is often presented as apolitical, vacant, and of poor quality. Interpretation of contemporary development in pop culture will be combined with readings of theorists such as Foucault, Mbembe, Balibar, Marx, Moretti, and Deleuze and Guattari. I argue that identification with trap music, even if it seems conformist and non-critical, is producing paradoxical minoritarian universalism, that could, if we understand the universalization of a dream of individual success as an implicit request for egalitarian society, present certain emancipatory potential.

Keywords: Trap music, universalism, race, class, becoming, identification, American Dream

Introduction

Usage of the word trap in contemporary media and public-speech is very diverse. This, sometimes, causes misunderstandings because the word itself could be connected with many different discursive fields: trap is a name for 1) a certain genre in hip-hop; 2) a certain subgenre of EDM music (sometimes also labeled EDM trap) ("What is Trap Music", 2013); 3) broader tendencies in contemporary pop music that often uses elements of trap, as music writer Taylor Bryant suggests "…what's considered trap is just as much Migos' 'Bad and Boujee' as it is Major Lazer's 'Lean On' or even Katy Perry's 'Dark Horse'." (2017). Interest in trap music increased after 2012, with an increase in online searches for the term.[1] At the same time a relative decrease in searches for the term "hip hop" was noted, supporting what many commentators observed: "[f]rom hip-hop to pop to EDM and beyond, the sound of trap music is everywhere" (Setaro, 2018). The majority of contemporary mainstream rap is actually trap (Migos, Rae Sremmurd, Savage 21) or at least possesses some of its elements (Kendrick Lamar, Drake, Kayne West) (Friedman, 2017). The rise of rap in general in the last few years is impressive. Music journalists commenting that for "… the first time ever, R&B/hip-hop has surpassed rock to become the biggest music genre in the U.S. in terms of total consumption, according to Nielsen Music's 2017 year-end report" (Ryan, 2018). Interest in the genre has also grown, with "… [l]istening in the genre increased 74% on Spotify in 2017..." (Bruner, 2018). In this article, I will not try to define trap as a genre or to present its genealogy. I will focus on a more specific question, which requires only certain elements from trap as a music genre: why is trap so popular? What is the link between trap music and the contemporary moment that could give an answer to this massive identification with trap music?

Trap music was a tradition of rap that developed during the 1990s outside traditional centers of rap creativity, neither on the east side (New York, Philadelphia) nor on the west side (Los Angeles and California), but in the south of the USA in Atlanta, Memphis, Miami, and Houston (Friedman, 2017; Setaro, 2018). This is an interesting moment for us: a new trend came from an unexpected place, from the "Dirty South". The term Dirty South, which was in a certain period almost a synonym with the term trap (in the narrower sense), was used as a "standard way of referring to the American South among rap music listeners" (Miller, 2004, n.p.). It connotes negative valuation: "[d]irt and dirtiness have … connotations of uncleanliness, disorder, corruption, unfairness and sexuality" and the south has, in the American context, connotations of "poverty, ignorance, rurality and violence" (Miller, 2004, n.p.). Trap music was, as we can see, among many not perceived as especially relevant or of good quality. Critics saw it as a vague, trivial and cheap genre, appropriate only for wild and excessive parties (Louis, 2015). Part of this rejection was based also on cultural prejudices that are similar to historical prejudices that were addressed to non-European cultures from the perspective of European civilization, which will present a crucial moment for our argumentation.

Trap began to reach strong presence on the mainstream Billboard music charts after 2009, with artists such as Young Jeezy, Gucci Mane, and Future, and producers such as Lex Luger and

[1] Google word searches for the term "trap" received significant growth in the number of searches after 2012, with its peak between 2015 and 2017. In comparison, the word rap, received equal attention between 2004 and 2017, while searches for the word hip-hop gradually declined in that period. Trends and interests, visible from the statistics of the history of Google search, could be checked on a public web facility Google Trends. The result that are presented are the product of the following parameters: time period – 2004 till today, area (whole world, excluding China, part of Asia and larger part of Africa (Google Trends does not cover those areas). Other parameters (categories of searched topics, etc.) are not specifically defined. We have to read those results with restrains. (there could be, for example, some events or phenomena that generated interest in the word "trap" that are not connected with the analysis).

Mike Will Made It (Lee, 2015; Adaso, 2017). It was at this time when the characteristic 808-kick drums and melodic synths that create an overall dark and grim, but sometimes also bright and laid-back atmosphere, started entering mainstream music in general. It became one of the most "default" sounds of the mainstream of today, separated from its roots (Bruner, 2018). As music writer Sammy Lee suggests, "… trap-rap stars are now hitting the top of the charts and electronic music's take on the sound is everywhere from high-street shops to summer music festivals" (2017). This all-presence causes difficulties in defining what exactly trap is. Some argue that the word should, because of the cultural appropriation, be reserved for a specific genre of rap, while others use it as a loosely defined buzzword that has been continuingly creating hype in clubs and festivals and passionate debate on comment sections and internet forums across the world.[2]

However, trap is not just a sound. Or conversely, sound cannot be separated from the practice of production in which it originally appears: those circumstances are somehow preserved inside the sound. The word trap (in the slang of Atlanta's African American population) signifies a place, usually a typical wooden house from Atlanta's devastated suburbs, where drugs and other illegal businesses take place, and where a certain lifestyle is practiced (Adaso, 2017). The term trap is appropriate, because it is hard to escape out of such a life-style in which people are entrapped. Studios, where the trap sound first appears, were usually a side product of the surplus money of illegal activities, while local night-clubs, strip-clubs, and street-corners were usually places where trap music was consumed. Trap music was therefore deeply connected with the under privileged community in which it originally appeared and it described nothing but the cruel reality in which that music was produced (Carmichael, 2017). That is why trap music is, often perceived as devoid of deeper meaning, promoting immoral behavior, talking mostly about money, drugs, women[3], criminal and other stories of "real" life. This reality is best described by the state of entrapment in a certain situation or in a certain way of life.

However, trap also presents exactly the opposite reality: it is also music about escaping the trap, about getting rich, having too much gold, and succeeding in life. Gold, jewelry and other prestigious objects shine out in many trap videos (Roberts, 2017). Viewer gets the impression that there is always too much money: dollars fly in the air or are burnt. As I shall examine in detail later, mostly through the example of Migos' hit *Bad and Boujee*, trap presents amtwo-fold reality: a reality of being entrapped on the one hand and a reality of extreme success ("from nothing to something") on the other. It presents a story of a transition from one extreme of social reality to the other. It is a reality of the "thug" life of the streets on the one hand, and a specific sort of "American Dream" reality on the other. Here a realistic presentation of life of the rich is not found, rather what is expressed is the phantasm of rich-life from the perspective of the poor. "Rap was for people who were on the bottom of the social hierarchy... So, when a select few were able to climb out of that despair into the ranks of the rich...it wasn't enough to have it... It had to be shown for all the world to see" (Roberts, 2017, n.p.).

Most of those elements could already be seen in (especially gangsta) rap from the 90s and 00s (Roberts, 2017). However, climbing from bottom to top is not only something that is presented in (some forms) of rap. It is also what rap as an act is all about. Rap, in its sincere and often angry speech from the perspective of the suppressed, entrapped or inferior, is sometimes similar to Michel Foucault's concept of fearless speech. Presented in one of his seminaries (Foucault,

[2] See for example answers on Quora on quesiton: "Why do some hip hop fans dislike trap music?" (Why do some hip hop fans dislike trap music?, 2017).
[3] Trap has been criticised a lot also because of its sexism. However, in the last years, many female rappers have appeared and some of them are adressing exactly this problem (Jordannah, 2018).

2001), Foucault analyses the ancient concept of "parrhesia" to define fearless speech as completely and absolutely real. It is real because it is completely and absolutely fearless, because it dares to tell things as they are, no matter the consequences, no matter what the lord (or any other sort of authority) would think about it: "if there is a kind of 'proof' of the sincerity of the parrhesiastes, it is his courage. The fact that a speaker says something dangerous – different from what the majority believes – is a strong indication that he is parrhesiastes" (Foucault, 2001, p. 15). Such speech is true also because it cannot be a mere performance or representation. The speaker cannot take any sort of distance towards his words: "He says what he knows to be true", as Foucault argues (Foucault, 2001, p. 14). Parrhesia is therefore "verbal activity" in which a speaker "expresses his personal relationship to truth" and "recognizes truth-telling as a duty" (Foucault, 2001, p. 19). It cannot be understood as a mere opinion, but it is in a certain sense complete and undoubted truth, truth including the "real" situation of the speaker. Similar discussion between real and true could be found in the rap community, where a crucial question is whether certain rap is "real" and "true" or if it is "fake" or "performed". Most of the critique that comes from the "old school" perspective, perceive trap and mainstream rap as being "fake", part of a post-modern mix of images that is completely separated from its roots and its emancipatory potential (Bryant, 2017). Of course, we cannot deny reproduction of some of the most problematic tendencies inside the cultural industry (for instance appropriation and commercialization), but nevertheless, I argue, that the mainstreaming of rap in general cannot be treated as "fake" appropriation of once authentic culture. Therefore, there is something "real" and "true" in identification with the imaginary of the previously described narrative of the two-fold reality of trap.

I argue that trap is "music of our time", not only as a sound, but more as a complex ideological mixture of certain affects. The concept of affection is, as Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari define it, an "encounter between the affected body and affecting body (with body taken in its broadest possible sense to include 'mental' or 'ideal bodies')" (Massumi, 1987, p. xvi). There are common affects therefore, between the music and listeners who identify with it worldwide. Those affects are "real" in the tautological sense, exactly because they are perceived as real, because the identification is real. This same tautology is at work in Deleuze's and Guattari's concept of desire: desire is always real, it is producing something, it is in direct correspondence with social production **(**Deleuze & Guattari, 2004, pp. 10–11**)**. We will have to ask ourselves in this context, which social production is combined with such a desire of production as it is presented in trap music. This article argues that late-capitalism in general, with its reproduction of inequality that increases social differences, also produces the two-fold reality presented in trap music. Individuals no longer identify themselves with the middle class, white, suburban situation, if this was previously the most common form of identification. This is in direct correspondence, as it will be demonstrated, with a turn in the main model of identification: from middle class suburbia to "the dirty south", as we argue in section "New Universalism".

Spontaneous movements of expropriated masses of people are always fascinating leftist (especially Marxist) intellectuals. Reasons for this fascination do not always come up from the ideological content that is expressed in those movements but first of all because of their specific structural position. The question of the self-awareness of ruled classes as the ruled – a self-awareness that is a precondition for the realization that their ideology is not the ideology of ruling class – has always been specifically complex in Marx. In *German Ideology* "the ruling ideas" are defined as "the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships, which make the one class the ruling one, therefore, the ideas of its dominance" (Marx & Engels, 2010, p. 169). Ruling ideas are therefore ideas of the ruling class, "hence among other things [they] rule also as thinkers, as producers of ideas, and regulate the production and distribution of the ideas

of their age" (Marx & Engels, 2010, p. 169). In difference with those who argue that trap music simply represents the ruling ideas of late capitalism (materialism, competition, individual success) (ndwogan, 2017), I will argue for the opposite: trap music represents the ideals of those who are suppressed. This thesis is comparable with the thesis of Slovenian Marxist Rastko Močnik who, in his analysis of the Punk movement in Yugoslavia in the 1980s, explains why Marxist theoretical approaches are useful in the context of subculture and pop-culture phenomena:

> When we analyze contemporary movements of expropriated youth crowds, we have to be aware that those crowds are not expropriated only directly "economically", but also ideologically – their "culture" and their "ethics" are taken away from them as an ability to establish their own ideological (class) platform on a progressive historical tradition. (Močnik, 1985, p. 62)

Class difference is therefore not embodied only as a different position in production, but also as a cultural difference. Antonio Gramsci may be the first who addressed the question of cultural difference, between 'the south' and 'the north', which could be useful in today's global context, even if it was originally applied only to Italy: why "southern" masses are not convinced by Marxist theory and why their "reality produces a wealth of the most bizarre combinations' of beliefs and expectations" (as cited in Arnold, 2013, p. 28). As E. P. Thompson commented in the context of colonial India, "there might be a radical disassociation – and at times antagonism – between the culture and even the 'politics' of the poor and those of the great" (as cited in Arnold, 2013, p. 36). In this context I argue that from a Marxist perspective, we should not treat the culture of the masses as irrelevant and useless and that we cannot dismiss identification with trap music worldwide as a mere trend of late capitalism.

This article seeks to explain identification with trap music and to present its correlation with the system of late capitalism. I attempt to defend the view, that this identification has emancipatory political potentials, even if it appears – with its promotion of materialism and individual success – as an ideology of a today's ruling class. The research data in this study is drawn from two main sources: 1) articles, essays and opinions about trap music and contemporary development in pop culture; 2) previously described theoretical background from critical theory, post-structuralism and Marxism. The article is divided into two parts. In the first part ("New Universalism") I establish the correlation between the imaginary of trap music and bipolar subjectivity of late capitalism. In order to point to the emancipatory potential of entrapped subjectivity, I introduce Deleuze and Guattari's concept of "becoming minority" and Achille Mbembe's understanding of universalism that is concentrated in a moto "Becoming Black of the World". In the second part (titled 'Bad Boujee') I further develop and strengthen our thesis through Marxian interpretation of concrete example of trap music, and Migos's hit *Bad and Boujee* that implicitly addresses questions of class and cultural differences.

New Universalism

As previously discussed, I am not interested primarily in trap as a music genre, but more on the wider sense of the concept of reality of trap. Trap, in a combination of the general meaning of the word trap and its more specific use in context of trap music, consists of a series of specific and often contradictory affects: trap is bitter-sweet, it includes nihilism and joy, states of ecstasy and states of depression, life up's and down's, entrapment and escape. As the main motto of the first season of Noisey's online documentary series *Noisey: Atlanta* (2015) states: "Sometimes you win, sometimes you lose" (as cited in "Welcome to the Trap", 2015). Such

statement presupposes a specific conception of reality. As Simon Reynolds pointed out in 1996, "real" in hip hop "signifies that music reflects a "reality" constituted by late capitalist economic instability..." (Fischer, 2009, p. 10). Mark Fischer similarly argues that:

> …the affinity between hip hop and gangster movies ... arises from their common claim to have stripped the world of sentimental illusion and seen it for 'what it really is': a Hobbesian war of all against all... where dog eats dog, where you're either a winner or a loser, and where most will be losers (Fischer, 2009, p. 11).

Such extreme competition is, as Franco "Bifo" Berardi explains, not sustainable in the long run: "a depression treatment based on artificially induced euphoria will not work" as the growth in economy could not prevent the next crisis, which is inherently inscribed in capitalism (Bifo, 2009, p. 210). According to Bifo, there is, therefore, strict correspondence between economic insecurity seen in the unpredictable growth and fall of values on financial markets, and insecurity on the psychological level, seen in the ambivalence of the main affects. This conception is similar to Mark Fischer's thesis that capitalism is, "with its ceaseless boom and bust cycles … fundamentally and irreducibly bipolar, periodically lurching between hyped-up mania... and depressive come-down..." (2009, p. 35). That bipolarity is composed of two complementary beliefs; one corresponding to state of mania, the other to state of depression. On the one hand there is an underlying conviction of depression, "that we are all equally uniquely responsible for our own misery and therefore deserve it" (Fischer, 2014, n.p.). On the other hand, is "the belief that it is within every individual's power to make themselves whatever they want to be" (Fischer, 2014, n.p.). According to Fischer, this is the "dominant ideology and unofficial religion of contemporary capitalist society" (Fischer, 2014, n.p.), that can be detected in the imaginary of hip-hop. For example, Kayne West's latest album hosts the contradictory, but self-explanatory motto "I hate being bipolar, it's awesome" (Fitzgerald, 2018). However, psychological classification of affects produced by late capitalism, should not be understood as a legitimization of the system: "[t]he current ruling ontology denies any possibility of a social causation of mental illness. The chemico-biologization of mental illness is of course strictly commensurate with its depoliticization" (Fischer, 2009, p. 37). On the contrary, and in the vein of the radical political theory and politics of the 1960s in 1970s (such as Laing, Foucault, and Deleuze & Guattari,), Fischer calls for the politicization (and not naturalization) of "extreme mental conditions" (Fischer, 2009, p. 19).

Bipolar affects are, I argue, not present only in trap music in the narrower sense of the term, but can be found in the large part of contemporary pop-culture in general. Therefore, it is not only a sound of trap, but the whole imaginary of being in the trap, that became mainstream and reached its worldwide presence. Today we are faced with many different identification movements rising autonomously worldwide, deep-inside of the streets, that share with trap music the same series of affects, sometimes similar aesthetics, combining dangerous and nihilistic atmosphere made of drugs, guns, money and a bit of "unheimlich", post-apocalyptic feeling. Trap in this wider sense could, therefore, be found not only in grime, drill, cloud- and mumble-rap or in the phenomenon of so called "SoundCloud rap" (Burford, 2018), but also in the Latin-trap (Leight, 2017; Suarez, 2017), in rap combined with turbo-folk in the Balkans (Maksimović, 2015), and in Chinese trap (Hawkins, 2018). However, those affects also go beyond the sphere of musical form of expression. Slav-squat Facebook and meme pages, popular especially in the Eastern Europe, present a caricatured image of street life in eastern Europe (Song, 2016). Furthermore, *Rick and Morty* (2013-present), a globally successful cartoon series, is all about entrapment and escape and especially about the absurdity of the life in general, without any superior or idealistic value in which one should believe (as cited in

Cinnamon, 2015). Trap music also became one of the most significant elements used in movies that present cruel social situation such as Spring Breakers, American Honey, and The Florida Project. In general, aesthetics in all those contexts includes in itself moments of "being nothing" or "being trash" on the one hand and moments of extreme richness, self-respect, and self-confidence on the other.

I argue, therefore, that described affects are becoming universal and that there are real and material reasons for that universalization. In order to defend that thesis, we have to address the most common criticism of popular (t)rap music which reduces its popularity to cultural appropriation, and claims that this popularity could be explained as a mere trend produced by the music industry without any relation to reality, and consequently also without any emancipatory potential (Thompson, 2017).

Cultural appropriation is supposedly first observed with the rise of rap to the mainstream of pop-culture in the late 1990s and early 2000s, when youth from both underprivileged areas and middle and upper class, started to identify with an underprivileged position. A central question in the evaluation of rap music in general, the question of who is authentic and who is performing and appropriating street aesthetic, was in the context of rap deeply connected with racial difference (Williams, 2017). In particular, the phenomenon of Vanilla Ice and Eminem provoked debates, some similar to the question surrounding white rap and trap music of today: can white people identify with black? Must they be poor, from under privileged areas or from broken families in order to be authentic? (Setaro, 2017; Charity, 2014). It is not a coincidence that the slang term "wigga" – signifying a white person who adopts some clichéd characteristics of black culture – became used in the context of hip-hop culture (Usborne, 1993). As the title of an influential book on rap culture suggests: "Everything but burden (what white people want to take from the black)" (Tate, 2003). However, cultural appropriation is not so problematic on the level of individual white consumers as on the level of the whole (predominantly white) cultural industry, which functions through appropriations of inventions of the "dirty streets". As Andre 3000 from OutKast observed (in the song Hollywood Divorce) "all the fresh styles always start off as a good, little, hood thing, ... take our game, take our name, give us a little fame and then they kick us to the curb that's a cold thang" (Burgess, 2012).

I do not deny that part of the phenomenon of "trap-identification" could be explained with the concept of cultural appropriation, neither do I deny the role of the music industry that (to a certain extent) reproduces the popularity of trap music. Nevertheless, I argue that there are also certain important differences between mainstream rap and mainstream music in general. Music, that is becoming mainstream, usually loses its edginess, its subversive message and its cultural identity (Livewire, 2006). It is interesting that in some cases of rap music, this scheme does not seem to fit entirely because it is the universal message of the suppressed and excluded, expressed in certain rap lyrics, which seems to be a crucial part of its mainstream potential. As Reynolds explains in the article *Street Rap* it is a "crucial paradox" that "the hardcore street scenes are populist but anti-pop. Their populism takes the form of tribal unity against what's perceived as a homogenous, blandly uninvolving pop culture. They are about the 'massive' as opposed to 'the masses'" (Reynolds, 2011, p. 241). Their popularity, comparable to the popularity of today's Migos, Future or Rae Sremmurd, is "responsive to the motility of popular desire" (Reynolds, 2011, p. 241). The imaginary inside it goes beyond the borders of black-ghettos: its universal popularity is in direct correspondence with the insecure and unstable bipolar subjectivity of late capitalism.

I argue that identification with a state of entrapment, seemingly universal today, produces a multitude of minority subjectivities that are gradually replacing the dominant, middle-class white male subjectivity of universal human subjectivity. Like Deleuze and Guattari in *Thousand Plateaus*, I argue for the universal minoritarian becoming that is in contrast with the concept of majority:

> all becoming is a becoming-minoritarian. When we say majority, we are referring not to a greater relative quantity but to the determination of a state or standard in relation to which larger quantities, as well as the smallest, can be said to be minoritarian: white-man, adult-male, etc. Majority implies a state of domination, not the reverse. (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 291)

The historic situation of black people has been (and still is) a paradigmatic example of a minoritarian state of entrapment. I do not argue for a form of change in which black identity replaces white to become a majority that represent universal human identity. On the contrary, the very idea of homogeneous majority, which is a foundation for universalism (from which minority is excluded), should be replaced with heterogeneous multitude of minorities that form a foundation for a universalism of a different kind. A universalism without exclusion, negation and without inner difference – present in the universalism of European enlightenment – that restrains it from becoming really universal. On the contrary, new universalism is a universal recognition of entrapment, a universal "becoming-minoritarian" of Deleuze and Guattari, that affirms diversity on the level of minoritarian identities. It is, because it resists the formation of normative a majority, not in contradiction with the equality between them. As Deleuze and Guattari argue:

> There is no subject of the becoming except as a deterritorialized variable of the majority; .... Becoming-minoritarian is a political affair and necessitates a labor of power [*puissance*], an active micropolitics. This is the opposite of macropolitics, and even of History, in which it is a question of knowing how to win or obtain a majority. As Faulkner said, to avoid ending up a fascist there was no other choice but to become-black. (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, pp. 291 292)

Many difficulties arise in such a constellation of "non-fascist" life which dem&s becoming minority. "Becoming-black" in Deleuze and Guattari's meaning of the term must be strictly separated from reversed racism. Blackness is not a basis for a new privileged, normative and major identity, exactly because reterritorialization of becoming in certain stable identity is something Deleuze and Guattari try to oppose with the concept of "minoritarian becoming": "[o]ne reterritorializes, or allows oneself to be reterritorialized, on a minority as a state; but in a becoming, one is deterritorialized. Even blacks, as the Black Panthers said, must become-black." (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 291). However, the tradition of black emancipation produced this thought in one of the most explained ways: Achille Mbembe's universalism, concentrated in the motto "Becoming Black Of the World", is not affirmation of only black identity, but "affirmation of the irreducible plurality of the world" (Mbembe, 2017, p. 156). Furthermore, as Mbembe argues, the term black itself often designates "a heterogeneous, multiple, and fragmented world" (p. 6).

Black identity is therefore only one of the minor identities. It is, nevertheless, the paradigmatic historic example of entrapped identity. The concept of "Blackness" was namely from its historic beginnings formed in relation to major (white culture), which is superficial and free in relation to subjected and entrapped blackness. As Mbembe argues: "The notion of race made

it possible to represent non-European human groups as trapped in a lesser form of being" (2017, p. 17). It is not a coincidence, therefore, that one of the main forms of success in this context was expressed in the notion of the "runaway" (Robinson J. C. & Robinson E. P., 2017, p. 3). Success of entrapped is therefore not to sustain or to defend the existing state or existing stable identity, but escape from the state of entrapment. This entrapment, that was in history most directly embodied in the figure of a black slave, represents impossibility of social transition, of any escape and becoming. On the discursive level this is legitimized by the exclusion of blacks from humanity, that was defined on the figure of majority, on the figure of the ideal (white) man: "[t]hey were the impoverished reflection of the ideal man, separated from him by an insurmountable temporal divide, a difference nearly impossible to overcome" (Mbembe, 2017, p. 17). In the same sense was according to Mbembe "Africa" in modern consciousness "the name generally given to societies that are judged impotent – that is, incapable of producing the universal and of attesting to its existence" (p. 49).

It would be a non-sense, to affirm such a form of black identity. That is why Mbembe's universalism is not based on it, but on universalization of difference. On the one hand, this universalization is affirmation of any difference inside humanity without any exclusion, what is precondition for real universalism. On the other hand, it is also an affirmation of desire for difference, that "emerges precisely where people experience intense exclusion" (2017, p. 183). "In these conditions, the proclamation of difference is an inverted expression of the desire for recognition and inclusion" (p. 183). Such universalism is a reversed image of an old universalism: a heterogenous minoritarian universalism of those who are excluded from homogenous majoritarian universalism. As Mbembe argues, to "affirm that the world cannot be reduced to Europe is to rehabilitate singularity and difference.... universal is always defined through the register of singularity" (p. 158).

The great danger of this approach is that it could lead to ignorance of differences between classes, races, and sexes. If I simply say, "we are all entrapped", we can find ourselves in a specific Foucauldian paradox. In one of his lectures on power, after explaining that power is not repression, that it is not in someone's hands and that it forms a "net-like" structure, Foucault stated: "… [b]ut I do not believe that one should conclude from that that power is the best distributed thing in the world, although in some sense that is indeed so" (1994, p. 215). If power (or entrapment) is everywhere, inflation of the very concept of power (or in our case the concept of entrapment) occurs. This inflation is used in certain white-supremacist ideologies as also in alt-right and some other neo-conservative movements, that have gained prominence in recent years. In order to be successful, even they have to put themselves in a position of an "underdog", in which the privileged (white-male-man) are presented as oppressed and excluded, as David Neiwert noticed (Neiwert, 2017). Appropriation of the discourse of the repressed, of the minority whose existence is endangered by a majority culture, presents a crucial ground for the legitimization of radical politics, that are suddenly seen as a mere self-defense of the suppressed. "White people are becoming second-class citizens", uttered David Duke in 1977 (as cited in Neiwart, 2017, p. 80). As Mathew Heimbach wrote in 2013 in the "Youth for Western Civilization (YWC)": "...we deserve the right to exist, deserve the right to defend our culture, and deserve the right to have a future for our culture" (as cited in Neiwart, 2017, p. 241).

However, I believe that the argumentation provides also a principle of selection that excludes such an appropriation of the entrapped position. First of all, in such an identification with the majority that only pretends to be a minority, there is no real "becoming minoritarian" in Deleuze and Guattari's meaning of the term. On the contrary in such an identification,

unchangeable majoritarian identity is affirmed. Furthermore, universalism that is "defined through the register of singularity" (Mbembe, 2017), affirms singularity of each trap (even if it is the trap of white male mentality that is usually behind historic universalism) and each speech that presents entrapment, as analyzed earlier through Foucault's concept of parrhesia, must reflect the reality that strictly corresponds with the position of the speaker. With this principle of selection, I can easily exclude such a performing of entrapment that wants to make America great again in the same way as rappers are excluded as being "fake" appropriation.

Universalization of entrapped position therefore calls for an adequate presentation of each singular entrapment. A similar argument was used by Foucault when he was confronted (by one of his students) with the reproach, that his analysis relativizes power:

> …because you are a student, you are on a certain position of power, and me, as a professor am also on certain position of power; I am on a position of power because I am a man and not a woman, and you are also on a position of power, because you are a woman. Of course, not on the same position of power, but we all are on positions of power. (Foucault, 2012)

There are different sorts of power (and different sorts of traps) and each speaker must, as in the case of Foucault's fearless speech, express the singular reality of his own singular trap.

Bad Boujee

Late capitalism, as explained, produces also its own main bipolar subjectivity or, better said, a series of subjectivities, that can be understood as different stages inside the story that presents individual success. It is a story of becoming what you want to be or what you have been before, if you already succeeded, or a dream about what you are going to become and how entrapped you are now, if you have not yet succeed. In this section I will further develop our argument for the popularity of such a frame and present some aspects of genealogy of modern capitalism leading to a state in which, as I argue, world-wide masses identify with movable and transient subjectivity. Through interpretation of Migos' 2017 top chart hit *Bad and Boujee*, I will analyze the question of cultural transformation of identity (on its way from the bottom to the top) and the question of legitimization of individual success (that is at the same time legitimization of the system that is based on ideal of individual success). Transformation of subjectivity presented in the imaginary of Migos' song, prompted analysis that discussed relations between trap music, critical theory and Marxism (Mueller, 2017; Zhang, 2017; Ganz, 2017; Wijesinghe, 2017; ndwogan, 2017). This was due mainly to the rapper's demonstration of "a movement from the working class to a rich and materialist 'boujee' class" (Wijesinghe, 2017) and the introduction of the "new bourgeoise", which is, as I will argue, different from the old bourgeoise in the same way as new universalism is different from the old universalism produced by European bourgeoise of the 18th and 19th century.

"We came from nothin' to somethin' nigga" sang Migos in "Bad and Boujee". The choice of the word "boujee", an abbreviation of the French "bourgeois", even if there are more common words in rap for a description of rich life, is crucial in this context. The structure of social climbing can first be observed in the literature of the 18th and 19th century, as it is presented by Franco Moretti in *The Bourgeois: Between History and Literature* (2013). The figure of the bourgeois in this context does not function as it does today. It does not signify someone who already possesses wealth and power, but exactly this transformation "from nothing to something" that directly corresponds with the rising of the bourgeoisie as a class, that from the

16th to 19th century gradually replaced the aristocracy as a ruling class (Moretti, 2013, pp. 12–17). The main legitimization was based on the idea that the bourgeois is somebody who's wealth is not simply inherited (as in the case of aristocracy), but a "self-made" man, who deserves what he has, because he himself with his own abilities of "self-restraint; intellectual clarity; commercial honesty; a strong sense of goals", came to privileged position (Moretti, 2013, p. 16). Moretti chooses as a paradigmatic example Daniel Defoe's novel *Robinson Crusoe*: the legitimate way to success is a combination of "adventure", "the sense for risk" and bravery on the one hand (pp. 25–29) and "rational work ethic", and delay of immediate satisfaction on the other (pp. 29–35). The same duality can be found in back story of today's pop-stars. Some praise dedication and hard work, and others God's gift, but a common factor is that they make money in their own. In the words of Migos' *Bad and Boujee*: "You know so we ain't really never had no old money – We got a whole lotta new money though" (Mueller, 2017).

The word bourgeois today signifies the opposite of its original meaning, now attributed to someone who inherited his wealth and social status by bourgeoisie pedigree and is therefore delegitimized on exactly the same basis as the aristocracy of old. Moretti does not speculate the number of individuals who inhabit this privileged position, but nevertheless, anticipates that the "American way of life" is probably the "Victorianism of today" (Moretti, 2013, p. 23). We can agree that "American way of life", or rather, the idealized image of this life as presented in the American Dream, is now a globally recognized ideal which functions analogically to the ideal of the bourgeoisie in the 18th and 19th century. In both cases, we are confronted with transformation which results in legitimate success. With legitimization of this form of success, the social system in which this success was possible is also legitimized.

A separate discussion will be needed to precisely analysis how liberal political thought, while establishing paradoxical thesis in which individual interest is equated with an interest of society as a whole, also blurs the division between the minority of those who can realize their interest, and the majority, who are excluded and even do not get this possibility. This was part of the function of the figure of Bourgeois and of American Dream imaginary: to (re)produce "universal" identification with values of the particular group (Livewire, 2006). As Moretti emphasizes, the word Bourgeois was not popularized in the Anglo-American context in 19th century, mainly because of the long tradition of capitalism and consequently, because of the existence of a larger middle class (in difference to continental Europe) (Moretti, 2013, pp. 8–12). "The lack of clear 'frontline' for the discourse on "Biirgertum" is what made the English language so indifferent to the word 'bourgeois' (p. 10). It follows that only a large gap between classes makes the Bourgeois visible as a particular (and not universal) figure in society.

It is not coincidence that the word Bourgeois latter appears in African American discourse with slightly different meaning, including not only class but cultural difference and mixed them both. The resulting effect is that a change of class also implies a change of culture. Citing the editor of *Journal of Hip Hop studies,* Daniel White Hodge, Catherine Zhang argues the term "Bougie" in 1950s among black community was used to describe an "…'elitist, uppity-acting African American' who has a higher education and income level than the average African American, and who 'identifies with European American culture and distances him/herself from other African Americans'." (Zhang, 2017, n.p.). Being "Bougie" at that time "implies the adoption of whiteness as a social identity" (Zhang, 2017, n.p.). The gap between both parts of African American society is therefore so obvious exactly because of the radical change of

cultural identity, that happened during the process of becoming bourgeois, which is not so obvious in case of the white community.[4]

However, it is crucial for us that Migos' *Bad Bougie* is not becoming white and does not change cultural identity while climbing a social ladder. Quite the opposite, what stands out is a very distinctive figure of "black bougie"; a bougie that preserves a lot of the clichéd customs from the previous 'street' life. As Zhang notes:

> In the song, Migos rap about stirring pots of drugs with Uzis, a type of Israeli submachine gun, making money off of the sale of cocaine, and having sex with women. The music video is filled with contradictory imagery. Women drink champagne poured out of gold bottles but eat Cup Noodles and fried chicken. (Zhang, 2017, n.p.)

This new "bougie" is not legitimized in the context of white bourgeois morality where bourgeois has to be a noble and respected person or – if we take a classic Victorian form of Bourgeois ideal analyzed by Moretti – a gentleman (Moretti, 2013, p. 120). And it is obvious that Migos in *Bad and Boujee* addresses exactly this perspective: why is their ethics (and aesthetics) seen as bad, sometimes even as degradation, from certain specific cultural perspectives or, if we put question in a Nietzschean manner, which interest is behind such judgment? In rap culture as a whole, there are many different wordings signifying exactly the opposite idea, that legitimate success is a route on which the subject remains the same as it was at the beginning without adoption to another culture: consistency, being true, being faithful to oneself, to the streets, to one's roots (Carmichael, 2017; Livewire, 2006).

A slight, but crucial, difference has occurred since the golden era of the American Dream ideal in the 1950s when a universal ideal was constructed of values of the white middle class. Identification with an image of life in the suburban white neighborhood does not seem to fit with the identification of the contemporary masses (Amadeo, 2018). This change has a material cause. As mentioned, the middle class is gradually disappearing in the time of late-capitalism. The gap between the bottom and the top is becoming more obvious. We therefore encounter a paradoxical twist: the universal position, historically prescribed to different types of white men (bourgeois, gentlemen, American dad), seems to lose its hegemony. It is gradually substituted by identification that was traditionally perceived as a minority. As I argue in this article, the ideology of the dominant class does not seem to be the dominant ideology anymore. Which is, according to Marx and Engels, basic for real (and not ideological) identification of subjected groups, and for their self-recognition (Marx & Engels, 2010, p. 169). That is the reason why we count on possibilities that are opened with this twist. As argued, I do not need new universal subjectivity, but qualitatively different universalism, the universality of that what was excluded from the bourgeoise universality. It is significant in this context, that Migos named their mega-successful 2017 album, on which also song Bad and Boujee could be found, with such a universal title as *CULTURE*: culture as such, new universal culture, but not a culture of a certain defined identity.

Migos' culture is often perceived as a part of general trend of non-critical affirmation of late capitalism in pop-culture that embodies all its problems and reproduces inequality: "[r]appers

[4] A similar, but exactly reversed change of culture happened in the context of one of the first modern subcultures, hipsters or "white negros": in order to be rebellious "frontiersman in the Wild West of American night life", Hipster has to identify with black (or at least perform this identification), "[s]ince the Negro knows more about the ugliness and danger of life than the White", as Norman Mailer argues in his famous essay (Mailer, 1957).

are incentivized to put personal achievement over social awareness, materialism over restraint, and Uzi-carrying as a better way of staying true to one's roots than giving back to the community" (ndwogan, 2017). Individualism, egoism, narcissism and dedication to work and individual success are in general often perceived as symptoms of the absolute triumph of late capitalism. Even if we look at a definition of the term that usually represents universal subculture of today – "millennials" – we can see common moments to those presented in trap music, which supports the thesis that we talk about universal ideals. Millennials – despite the fact that term itself usually addresses only white middle class youth – are perceived as "more focused on materialistic values...such as money, fame, and image..." (Main, 2017, n.p.). They are seen as unrealistic regarding career and as individuals, appreciating only individual success instead of the success of the group (Main, 2017). As Malcom Harris argues, millennials "never learned to separate work and life" (Harris, 2017, Location No. 145), what he proves exactly through example of rap music: "[h]ustling has always been part of trying to come up in the creative world, but like everything else, it has intensified. The Fresh Prince could rap about relaxing, but now "work" is the name of the game, from Britney Spears to Gucci Mane." (Harris, 2017, Location No. 1891).

Another crucial characteristic that is often described to millennials is their submissive character, lack of any kind of rebellion and of any kind of utopic political ideals, which characterized previous generations and their subcultures. "Millennials have been trained to hold sacred our individual right to compete, and any collective resilience strategy that doesn't take that into account is ill-conceived, no matter how long and glorious its history. No one seems to know what we – with all our historical baggage – can do to change our future" (Harris, 2017, Location No. 199). That individualistic materialism becomes the reason for the lack of alternatives to the ideals of late capitalism, is crucial to Fischer's concept of capitalist realism:

> The Selfish Capitalist toxins that are most poisonous to well-being are the systematic encouragement of the ideas that material affluence is the key to fulfillment, that only the affluent are winners and that access to the top is open to anyone willing to work hard enough, regardless of their familial, ethnic or social background. (Fischer, 2009, p. 36).

Contrary to Fischer, I argue, that there is hope for a better future in the universalization of such a form of success, even for those who do not love capitalism totally, no matter how contradictory this seems. In this sense, our approach is close to accelerationism, as described by Benjamin Noys, where "[t]he result is that each intensifies a politics of radical immanence, of immersion in capital to the point where any way to distinguish a radical strategy from the strategy of capital seems to disappear completely" (Noys, 2014, Location No. 190). This same indistinctiveness appears in our analysis: universalization of a dream of individual success produced by "The Selfist Capitalist toxins" could not be divided from the rational claim of the masses; that want happy, successful and prosperous lives.

The desire for success is what drives the music scene and increases its productivity, but it seems inevitable that "only [a] few will ever have a chance of making it" (Reynolds, 2011, p. 386). However, acceleration of that process that results in universal materialization of the desire for success, would, paradoxically but structurally necessarily, produce equality. If every trap in this world becomes the center of civilization, and if every "trash" of this world becomes a star, the final result would be equality. That is, value indifference between the successful and entrapped. Maybe we should, as Deleuze and Guattari propose, accelerate the production of value, "go further...in the movement of the market of decoding and deterritorialization…[f]or perhaps the

flows are not yet deterritorialized enough, not decoded enough… Not to withdraw from the process, but to go further, to 'accelerate the process'…" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004, p. 260).

Therefore, we deny that the subjectivity presented in Migos' imaginary, even if it is totally uncritical and adopted by capitalism, does not have any emancipatory potential. It is not necessary for us to understand their claim for material goods, fame and luxury life as only an ideology of late capitalism. From the perspective of new universalism, we may understand those claims as legitimate demands of the world's proletariat. The Proletariat is namely defined as "the class antagonist of the bourgeoisie, and hence places its own interests above theirs" (Balibar, 1988, p. 166). It is a class of those who are excluded from the sphere of bourgeois abstract universality and those who are expropriated of wealth. In order to reach universality, the proletariat must subsume "specific interest into a 'general interest'… once it matches its definition, it is no longer simply a class but the masses" (Balibar, 1988, p. 166). It is only logical, from this perspective, that the proletariat (embodied in the Migos) claim participation on the level of discourse and participation in the sharing of wealth.

Migos' imaginary could in this context be seen not as a legitimation of the "new bourgeoise", but as a revelation of the absurdity of the rarity of success in capitalism and its devaluation. As Gavin Mueller interpreted, *Bad and Boujee* reveals that "such wealth in the face of so much misery is fundamentally absurd, and so it is best consumed on ridiculous vehicle customization, diamond-encrusted chokers, and Louboutin sneakers. They know that being bad and being bourgeois go together like white and T-shirts" (Mueller, 2017). Through that reading, the message of the Migos is that everybody can (and must) become something from nothing, as they did. The global universalization of the dream of success, which does not have any outside and any negation, could (even if produced in the middle of late-capitalism) provide the potential for a dream of a utopian end of the system that reproduces inequality. However, we must admit, that this is still just a dream and the main question is, how to make it real and how to materialize the universal dream of success for anyone.

Conclusion

This article has discussed the reasons for the popularity of trap. The popularity of trap music, that was observed as a phenomenon especially in recent years, was explained through a correlation between social production and desire production, between affects presented in music and main affects reproduced in late capitalism. This reality is on the one hand indistinguishable from the ideology that produces the subjectivity of late capitalism. At the same time, it cannot be treated as a mere false consciousness: it reflects two-fold reality of extreme success on the one and entrapment on the other hand. This corresponds with separation on two extremes which can be observed in bipolarity as a main disorder of late capitalism (as described by Fischer). Furthermore, that bipolarity very well reflects our evaluation of trap music: I do not deny that it could be treated as consumeristic, mainstream and appropriated by the music industry, but nevertheless, the main thesis of this article is that it includes emancipatory potential. That potential could, as I argue, be reached not with restraining, but with acceleration of the process, with universalization of "minoritarian becoming" (analyzed through Deleuze & Guattari and Mbembe) in correspondence with a new universal culture, presented by Migos and their figure of the new bourgeois.

Although this article focuses on the relation between critical theory and a certain type of music, the exploration can be expanded to fields of pop-culture's imaginary. Some of its findings, may

have implications on the complicated relation between class and cultural differences, and other problematic issues that characterize contemporary emancipatory struggles and discourses.

One of their main paradoxes seems that those emancipatory struggles and discourses often lack mass support and remain limited to small groups of progressive political activists. From another perspective, movements that reached massive popularity, with adaptation to mainstream expectations, often lose their emancipatory potential. Our analysis of trap is therefore an example that could help find a solution to that knot. I have explored some factors that are necessary to solve one of the crucial questions for today's critical thought – how to reach massive popularity and preserve emancipatory potential? How to connect critical thought with the movement of desire of the masses?

However, the problem may lie in the way the question is posed. Namely that the aim should not be just about how to inject rational critical thought in mass movements, but also conversely, to recognize the potential for rational critical thought that are already present in the imaginary of the masses.

This leap between the pop-culture and critical theory, is also the main reason for the limitations of our research. That these discourses rarely meet is the main reason, I believe, for a lack of academic debate about trap music. There are numerous non-scientific internet debates about trap music, but few incorporate critical theories. Conversely most critical theories judges pop-cultural phenomena such as trap music as being vague, trivial and not worthy of a serious investigation. In this context, this article aims to be a small step in overcoming this situation.

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Whose Story is This? The Non-existence of the External Gaze in David Lynch's Films

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Abstract

The tendency to eschew a coherent narrative has been very common especially since the 1990s and a certain approach to narration has become observable within postmodern cinema: the viewer is denied access to the truth and realities concerning dramatic structure and characters, either during part of the narrative, or throughout the entire movie. For instance, Stuart Mitchell (1999) points out that in David Lynch's *Lost Highway*, as Lynch himself points out, the dream/dreaminess is neither a fantasy nor a delusion but something intrinsic to the character, thus what we watch is essentially the story of the main character and it is realistic according to his logic. Analysing the David Lynch's *Lost Highway* (1997), *Mulholland Drive* (2001) and *Twin Peaks: The Return* (2017), this article will discuss how any attempt by the viewer to achieve the truth and to distinguish reality from fantasy may be fruitless and how the filmic or fictional reality may result undistinguishably from so-called material reality. I argue that the viewer moves and stumbles with the gaze of the camera which reveals that the reality is something constructed, and that the objective reality of an external gaze doesn't exist.

Keywords: external gaze, David Lynch, reality, fantasy, reconstructed reality, dream

Introduction

The tendency to reject a coherent narrative has been very common especially since the 1990s within postmodern cinema, in which the director's cat-and-mouse game constitutes the core of a film. In these films, the truth and realities concerning dramatic structure and characters are hidden from the viewer. In addition to this obfuscation, some films, and especially in David Lynch's cinema, deny viewers access to truth and objective reality. In other words, the construction of narratives around shifts, from one level of reality or timeline to another, frees the director from the responsibility of coherence. In postmodern narratives, in which shifts in reality are presented through inhabiting the gazes of schizophrenic characters, the director deprives the viewers of the truth that they could have had in a traditional narrative. In Lynch's films, the viewer also faces the fact that there is no such thing as reality outside the film, as opposed to illusion or fantasy.

Many critics have attempted to define a plot or a linear structure in Lynch's films, by reorganizing seemingly arbitrarily arranged sequences. Many interpretations suggest, for example, that in *Mulholland Drive* (2001) and *Lost Highway* (1997) everything perceived as real by the viewer is a dream. The narrative structure proceeds in a chaotic and fragmented way, paralleling the main character's journey of self-discovery. In *Lost Highway*, *Mulholland Drive* and *Twin Peaks: The Return* (2017), the events ensue within a circular structure, and the narrative returns to the beginning through specific motifs, acts or symbols. The camera, focusing on what goes through the main character's mind, often exhibits to the viewer the same event, motif, mise-en-scène or detail through different (re)constructions and representations. It tantalizingly suggests a puzzle to be solved in order to reveal the linear narrative beyond the schizophrenic gaze of the protagonist or the camera.

This article argues for a critical approach that is submerged in a dreamlike world where a story (even a simple one) could be built in various ways, thus creating various reality planes. In this alternative approach, the emphasis shifts from distinguishing between reality and non-reality (illusion/dream/delusion) to the possibility that the so-called objective reality or the reality we are living into could be structured in multiple ways, through various representations and forms. In Lynch's narratives, the characters try to maintain an ideal ego of themselves or to achieve an unworldly sublime universe and, while confronting this process, they strive to understand which plane of reality they are inhabiting. Therefore, different identities' overlap, and multiple versions of realities and forms of representation take place. The significations attributed to the concepts of reality, fantasy and dream and their contradictions are destroyed and cinematic conventions become ambiguous. As Stuart Mitchell (1999) points out about Lynch's *Lost Highway*, the dream in the film is neither a fantasy nor a delusion but something internal about the character. Thus, what we watch is essentially the story of the main character and it is realistic according to his/her logic.

Žižek (2008) refers to Lacan's *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, when explaining that ideology is a dream-like illusion:

> Here Lacan mentions the well-known paradox of Zhuang Zi, who dreamt of being a butterfly, and after he is awakening posed himself a question: how does he know that he is not *now* a butterfly dreaming of being Zhuang Zi? (pp. 45–6)

According to Žižek (2008) Lacan's explanation is that this question is justified for two reasons. First, it proves that Zhuang Zi was not a fool, since he does not believe in his immediate identity

with himself, and he is capable of a dialectically mediated distance from himself. Second, it proves that the subject could not be reduced to a void; the fantasy offers the possibility for the subject to obtain some content. When he was thinking that he was a butterfly dreaming of being Zhuang Zi, Zhuang Zi was in a way correct. In the symbolic reality he was Zhuang Zi but in the Real of his desire he was a butterfly and being a butterfly was the whole consistency of his positive being outside the symbolic network (Žižek, 2008, p.46).

This paradox reflects also the concept of reality/fantasy in Lynch's films. In the Zhuang Zi story there is no distinction between the absolute/material reality and fantasy; the dream is not seen as something fake or artificial. It's just another form of reality and, in fact, being a butterfly is considered the whole consistency of the being.

Lynch's films, as often stated, are constructed within a dream logic even though most of the time the dreamlike or illusionary state is indistinguishable from reality or entails different, superimposed planes of reality rather than a conflict between realities. Time, space and dimensionality are not comprehensible or coherent in terms of linearity; it's not a question of solving a puzzle to achieve a distinction between dream and reality and, in this way, to capture the material reality and an objective gaze on what is happening. The attempt to put together the events in a chronological and logical order within the causation, through an external gaze representing the objective reality, eventually fails because even the supposed awakening from the illusion or another plane of reality is revealed to be engulfed within the dream logic and the subjective constructions of reality.

***Lost Highway* (1997)**

The plot of *Lost Highway* is quite difficult to summarize. Extending the interpretation given by Patricia Arquette (Rodley, 1997, pp. 231–2) who played Renee/Alice in the film, it could be said that it is the story of Fred Madison (Bill Pullman), who killed his wife, Renee, because he thinks she is cheating on him. Once he is convicted and sentenced to death, Fred cannot come to terms with his responsibility and creates a new reality for himself where he becomes Pete Dayton (Balthazar Getty), a young and pleasant man who is in love with Alice, a woman looking exactly like Fred's wife. After transforming back into Fred, he is led by Mystery Man (Robert Blake) to kill Mr. Eddy/Dick Laurent (Robert Loggia), who is Alice/Renee's lover. Fred then returns to his house to warn himself that "Dick Laurent is dead", a sentence he hears from his intercom at the beginning of the film.

Lost Highway begins with an apparently classic noir/thriller narrative using the classical stereotypes of Hollywood genres: the femme fatale, the Godfather-like rival, the overwhelmed, challenged male character and the relationship between a femme fatale and a worker who becomes an accomplice. The codes embody a narration that, in the end, drive the viewer to conclude that the film might be about Fred's dream or schizophrenic delusion. This schizophrenia interpretation is supported by the circularity of the plot when Pete transforms back to Fred, suggesting that Pete Dayton was created by Fred as an escape from the responsibility of the murder he committed. Žižek (2000), however, warns that such an interpretation is the "film's ultimate lure to be resisted" (p. 15). Indeed, as will be discussed, the narration invalidates any absolute explanation creating thereby a sense of loss.

The sense of loss is caused by the continuous overlapping and switching of realities, dreams and "constructed reality". While reality is to be construed as the main events happening through interactions among people in shared spaces and dreams, the "constructed reality" is an intertextual link between apparently unlinked realities within the filmic space. The continuous

change of perspective alters the perceived truth to the point of creating a new level of reality that absorbs every plane into a tangible yet inseparable part of itself. For example, the dream told by Fred to Renee after making love anticipates Renee's murder, and various narrative elements make it hard to tell whether it is a dream or not: the use of Fred's voice-off as narrator; the camera's gaze switching between subjective and objective points of view; the jump cuts and fades linking each scene; the use of the dream logic; and the scene where Fred wakes and sees the face of Mystery Man. These cues prompt the audience to question the boundaries between reality and fantasy. This sequence, furthermore, instills the doubt that even the act of making love could be a part of Fred's dream. For the act is shown in slow motion and Renee's voice is always off-screen, it sounds soft, muffled, giving it a dreamlike status. It's impossible for the viewer to recognize the beginning and ending points of the dream. The viewer becomes aware that Fred is awake only after he turns the light on, yet the beginning of the dream cannot be precisely discerned.

The alteration of reality is strongly marked when Fred meets Mystery Man at Andy's (Michael Massee) party. Mystery Man gets close to Fred crossing the room without interacting with the people around him, as if Fred were the only one to see him. All diegetic sounds are silenced. Only the conversation between Fred and Mystery Man is clearly heard. Mystery Man asks him whether they met before and tells him that they have met at Fred's house. Was Mystery Man referring to the dream or to something else? He then says he is in Fred's house "right now" and passes his mobile phone to Fred, asking the latter to call him at his house. The conversation with the "remote" and the "on-site" man, along with the silenced environmental sounds, gives the impression of being moved to another level of reality or to a dreamlike state. When Mystery Man moves away from Fred, the environmental sounds fade back in. The viewer is led to think that it was Fred's fantasy but, a few moments later, the presence of Mystery Man is confirmed by Andy who tells that the man is a friend of Dick Laurent. So, if Mystery Man really exists, was the conversation real too? Is Mystery Man a supernatural entity? We have no clear answer to the question. We know Fred saw Mystery Man before, although it was apparently in a dreamlike moment, but they cannot define the nature of both meetings beyond the certainty that Fred really experienced them.

Videotapes received by Fred and Renee add another level of complexity to the narration. The footage has an amateur quality and is often grainy suggesting tape damage. This makes the spaces and persons difficult to recognize, "unsettling any rational sense of safety and security" (Mactaggart, 2010, p.126). Handheld camera footage is usually considered highly reliable, as it evokes a sense of documenting reality. The footage in question in *Lost Highway* is from a high-angle as if there was an external observer. The shots do not provide any additional information beyond that already provided by Fred's point of view, they just confirm what audience already knows. The last videotape, for instance, does not question how or why the slaughter happened, it just shows that Renee is dead. As Mactaggart (2010) points out, it was Fred's dream that shows how it happened: "The use of different film stocks provides for subjective shifts in emphasis, to offer a grainy interpretation of Fred's mental state, as well as for temporal shifts in which the events depicted occur at different levels of the narration, so that any certainty about the sequence of events is constantly undermined" (p. 105). Thus, the viewer has no stable ground to define the boundaries of the reality of the main characters, contrary to classical narratives of American cinema where "the audience was given the optimum vantage point on what was occurring on screen" (Ray, 1985, p. 33).

In David Lynch's films a vantage point from which the puzzle could be solved is at times tantalizingly hinted. Sometimes the external gaze seems to be created through the detective characters or the camera's eye but as is seen in *Lost Highway* this vantage point is illusionary. The detectives, who give an impression of the existence of an external gaze, become a part of the reality/fantasy game. The detectives in *Lost Highway* ask absurd questions with deadpan expressions to Fred and Renee: "This is the bedroom? You sleep here in this room? Both of you?". They're inefficient and incapable of solving the mystery, and thus they differ from the detectives of classic narratives who solve the crime through an investigation based on a rational process. The detectives are thus offered as an external gaze to the mystery of the videotape story. Even when the film suggests the events to be Fred's fantasy, there is an inclination to seek out this external, rational gaze to indicate the boundaries between fantasy and reality, however illusionary that gaze may be.

The illusion of an external gaze or of another eye can be distinguished also in the scene where the detectives leave Fred and Renee's house. The two detectives are shown with Renee and Fred in a high-angle shot, creating the sense that they are under observation. The identity of the observer is not immediately apparent: h/she might be the person who sends the anonymous video tapes to Fred's house. But soon after it turns out that it is Mystery Man who holds the camera. As he is a part of Fred's reality there is no external/objective gaze that defines the confines of this reality and its interactions with others and the outside world. The hidden camera which initially gives the impression of an external observer is revealed to be the gaze of Fred Madison, portrayed as if it was a gaze of someone/something external that witnesses Fred's world.

After being sentenced to death, Fred becomes Pete, a transformation likely caused by a mental breakdown. This transformation, along with the overlapping of Renee and Alice, is the reason why many interpretations of the film views Pete as a fantasy, or an alter ego created by Fred.

Fred and Pete's storylines express the fantasy in different ways. While Fred's part is based more on the dreamlike state as a prelude to his mental breakdown, in Pete's part the status is represented rather as a hallucination underlying the upcoming collapse of his fantasy. In Fred dreams the camera's gaze is quite steady and objective albeit one that blurs the boundaries between reality and dream/fantasy. In Pete's hallucination at Andy's house the gaze is subjective, the movement is unstable and the boundaries between fantasy and reality are strongly marked through visual and sound effects. Comparing Pete's hallucination to the events Fred experiences at the Lost Highway Hotel, the parallels (Figure 1) are evident and cast doubt on whether Pete's experience was a sort of premonition, an overlapping of realities or some kind of memory. Lynch attributes the same 'reality' status to both dimensions and, in doing so, precludes any clear answers. The reality is deconstructed and related to the protagonist's experience, regardless of whether or not it is a hallucination.

Figure 1: Hallucination of Pete (left) vs "Reality" of Fred (right) at Lost Highway Hotel

Pete's transformation into Fred presents the same problem. Fred reappears after Pete makes love with Alice. The lights illuminating the two lovers mark the scene as if it was a dream similar to the one Fred had the night before they received the second videotape. This is an example of the circularity suggested by Žižek (2001) where the two realities collapse. Indeed, after Fred turns back, seemingly confirming that Pete is a product of his mind, Mystery Man reinforces the interpretation of collapsed realities by saying that the woman isn't Alice, but Renee. The fact that Fred sees Dick Laurent making love with Renee at the Lost Highway Hotel opens up the possibilities that the fantasy is ongoing, even though Pete has disappeared, or that the homicide of Renee is another fantasy and the crime in question is the murder of Dick Laurent. The sequence takes place during a thunderstorm, recalling the hallucination Pete had in Andy's house. The parallels between the two sequences suggests that it is impossible to guess which is real, or if any fantasy actually existed.

The circle is closed when Fred says, "Dick Laurent is dead" (as heard by Fred himself at the beginning) to his own intercom at the end of the film. This development puts into question the linearity of time and causation, and the viewer's beliefs on what happened earlier. Even though the mystery on the first scene has been solved and the owner of the voice speaking to the intercom revealed, at the same time all the linearity and rational distinctions need to be discarded. Fred's identity shift in the last sequence suggests that each transformation generates new realities and, therefore, each storyline, has to be considered as "real". As Stuart Mitchell (1999) points out, David Lynch himself describes *Lost Highway* as the story of Fred Madison, suggesting that the narrative is not a dream and entirely realistic according to the logic of Fred (p. 291).

***Mulholland Drive* (2001)**

While in *Lost Highway* the boundaries between fantasy and reality are marked visually, and viewer led to think about a hallucination, the relative linearity of *Mulholland Drive* presents a more coherent reality during the first two-thirds of the film, that is completely deconstructed it in the last third. The intelligibility turns out to be just an illusion anyway, for, as Zina Giannopoulou (2013) suggests, *Mulholland Drive* presents all the tropes of Lynch's cinema:

> non-linear patterns of exposition, intransitive narrative – in which the chain of causation that motivates the action and drives the plot is interrupted or confused through spatial

> and temporal fragmentation – fluid character identities, a blurry borderland between dreaming and waking life or knowledge and illusion, and loss of memory (p. 2).

In a similar way to *Lost Highway*, *Mulholland Drive* initially has the typical structure of film noir: a woman with amnesia escapes from a murder attempt and finds support in a stranger; a love affair flourishes; an intrigue begins to emerge. This linearity is suddenly subverted after the two-thirds of the film and all the knowledge acquired by the audience is put into question. Identities, relationships and causality of events radically change. Unlike *Lost Highway*, where Fred and Pete are physically different, Betty/Diane (Naomi Watts) and Rita/Camilla (Laura Harring) have the same appearance and, as in *Lost Highway*, they switch identities: the sweet and naive Betty becomes the sour and angry Diane; the pliant and insecure Rita, becomes the self-confident and opportunist Camilla. This is a radical change that puts their true identities into question. Denham and Worrel (2013) suggest that Rita and Camilla may not be the same person because in Betty's storyline Camilla is portrayed by another actress, Melissa George (p. 8). Mactaggart (2010) suggests that the film "presents the initial depiction as if from Rita's fantasy while the spectator may or may not come to understand that is actually Diane's fantasy all along" (p. 109). These considerations point to the loss generated by the radical switch. Furthermore, the switch questions the nature of the first part of the film: was it all a dream, an hallucination or an alternate reality?

Mulholland Drive does not give any clues regarding the status of different planes of reality. Compared to *Lost Highway,* the boundaries are more blurred and, until the last part of the film, the existence of different planes of reality is not evident. Hollywood provides the perfect backdrop for this particular story, considering that "dream machine" is a common metaphor for Hollywood. The audience is able to recognize the truth status of the narrative only retrospectively. Betty audition's scene, for instance, uses soap opera codes explicitly: the male character of the audition looks and acts like exaggerated and malicious soap opera characters; the passionate interaction between Betty and Chad is too melodramatic, the acting is too affected; the reactions of the crew as their audience are too enthusiastic. Toward the end of the film Betty's whole dream of becoming a Hollywood star seems increasingly naïve and ingenuous. When Betty wakes up as Diane the previous setting is revealed as a constructed reality. As Mactaggart (2010) suggests, we as viewers can never be sure whether we are placed in Diane's fantasy projection as Betty, and he points out to her riveting performance at an audition for a daytime soap, preceded by a more prosaic rehearsal with Rita which also implicates a parody of their break up (p. 60).

In Lynch's films scenes that don't seem to contribute to the main plot immediately can, in retrospect, be recognized as signs indicating that what is presented is not as inconsistent as it might have appeared. For instance, when Joe (Mark Pellegrino), the hitman, is first introduced, he does not seem related to the main plot (Betty and Rita's storyline). He is presented in a sequence where he makes a mess, killing more people than he planned to. Afterwards it is revealed that Joe was hired by Diane/Betty to kill Camilla and in the reconstructed reality of Diane/Betty he should not have committed the murders. Here, as in other Lync films, the director creates a kind of short circuit in the reconstructed reality, as if expecting the viewer to notice that all of the absurd, overly melodramatic, or overly movie-like moments could just be a part of a fantasy. Yet, these parts are just implications rather than clues since viewers never acquire the information based on an external gaze helping them distinguish between fantasy and material reality. Another example is the sequence at beginning of the film when Betty lands in Los Angeles. The camera shows Betty catching the taxi, and in another taxi her travel companions who are laughing in an uncanny way that recalls the laughs of Bob and Man From

Another Place in *Twin Peaks* (1992) and *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me* (1992). This scene is arguably an initial short circuit in the fantasy. The old couple is not shown from Betty's point of view, so it gives us an illusion of the external gaze, but they actually belong to Diane/Betty's reconstructed reality. Their uncanny laughing, indeed, implies that there is something "broken" in this version of the story.

The topic of dream/fantasy is suggested once again by Dan's (Patrick Fischler) story at Winkie's. At first, this seems to be one of the subplots not contributing to the main story, yet it contains some elements connecting the two storylines. The restaurant is the same where Rita and Betty go after calling the police and also where Diane hires the hitman (Joe) to kill Camilla; the vagabond-looking man met by Dan is the one carrying the blue box, that causes shifts in reality and ejects the old demoniac couple seen in the final scene. The latter Winkie's scene with Rita and Betty, moreover, is specular to the one with Herb and Dan. The first Winkie's sequence begins inside the restaurant and ends in the alley behind. The second one begins at the alley and ends inside the restaurant.

In the first part, Lynch presents contextual details to focus on Rita's story. An example is the meeting between Laney (Rena Riffel), a young woman and probably drug addict, and Joe, a man who seems to be connected to Rita's car accident. Joe, who will be revealed to be the killer of Camilla, asks Laney if a brunette woman was seen on the street. The scene, in light of the sequence of events and background information, suggests the conversation to be about Rita, and that the latter to be a prostitute or an escort. This presumption is the corollary of having seen Rita before in a limousine, threatened by an armed man and constantly refusing police assistance, as if she has something to hide. Thus, the detail about a "brunette on the street" revealed by a man who killed three people in the previous scene is enough to make the viewer think that she might be a prostitute.

Every certainty about the sequence of events suddenly collapses when it is revealed that Betty is Diane and Rita is Camilla. Therefore, all the knowledge the viewer acquired until that point must be reconsidered. The linearity of the story is inverted. While in Betty's timeline events are added as new revelations, in Diane's timeline they are presented as parts of a memory that is being restored. Every scene is like a flashback filling the void of memory and, at the same time, every new fragment undermines the viewer's position of the knowing subject, this undermining constituting one of the core elements of the postmodern narrative.

The constructed reality arises completely toward the end, through the climax in Diane's memory-restoring process that reveals the connections between the two storylines. So, Winkie's is the place where Dan tells Herbs about the dream, it is also where Rita begins to remember, and where Diane starts acting on her intention to get Camilla killed. The opening scene in which Rita has a car accident is a re-imagination of Diane's trip to Camilla's party. Almost all the characters in Betty's story reappear with different roles and personalities in Diane's one.

The first time the viewer is warned about a possible dream/fantasy or a reality reconstructed as a movie fantasy is in the scene at Club Silencio. This scene reveals to the viewer that they shouldn't take for granted what they have seen and what they will see. The Magician (Richard Green), in fact, issues a warning: "It is all recorded. It is all a tape. It is an illusion". This message is reinforced by the performance of Rebekah Del Rio (Rebekah Del Rio), when her song continues in playback after she collapses to the ground. The scene seems completely surreal: the theatre with the red curtains recalls the Red Room in *Twin Peaks*; the two girls

seated on the right side of the theatre look like Laura Palmer and Ronette Pulaski[1] *from Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me;* the blue lights, often used by Lynch to imply a sense of dreaminess, are present. As Mactaggart (2010) states, the scene best encapsulates the alienating yet absorbing quality of presenting the viewer with the "constructedness" of film (p. 61). Club Silencio represents the place where the characters meet the audience and both of them confront the inconsistency of reality. It is where, in the last scene of the film, the light of the microphone on the stage fades out, the dreamlike blue colour withdraws, the natural colours of the theater appear and the woman with blue hair in the lodge looks at the camera saying "Silencio" (the Spanish word for "silence") as if a new show is to begin, or the show had come to an end due to the death of Diane in the moment when the screen fades to black.

The awareness acquired about the fantasy in *Mulholland Drive*, does not enable the viewer to experience a material reality despite being shown the points of view of side characters. McGowan (2004) points out that Rita and Betty do not recognize Diane's body because they are inside the fantasy, and what the audience perceive is the reality of Rita and Betty (p. 80). That is why Diane's neighbour does not recognize Betty as Diane and her point of view cannot be relied upon as an objective gaze, even though the audience sees her outside the house when she is not seen by Rita and Betty.

***Twin Peaks: The Return* (2017)**

Twin Peaks: The Return (Lynch, 2017) takes place 25 years after the end of the Season Two of *Twin Peaks* (1990-1991) as announced by Laura Palmer (Sheryl Lee) to Dale Cooper (Kyle MacLachlan) in Episode 30: "I'll see you again in 25 years. Meanwhile...". As stated by Showtime's President David Nevins, "the core of it is Agent Cooper's odyssey back to Twin Peaks" (Indiewire, 2017 para 7) and, as described by Lynch himself, it is a film broken in 18 parts, each one being one hour long, making *Twin Peaks: The Return* an 18 hour film (Deadline, 2017). The fact that the season should be considered as a film is reaffirmed in episode titles where the names are composed by "Part" followed by the episode number.

Despite being launched as a sequel to the 90s events, the new season only adopts the starting point and main characters from the earlier series, focusing rather on the deconstruction of reality that Lynch already attempted to do in *Lost Highway* and *Mulholland Drive.* In Lynch's previous works, the viewers, even if unable to distinguish clearly the boundaries between reality and dream/fantasy, could attribute the experienced realities to one subject. *Lost Highway* and *Mulholland Drive* were about one subject experiencing different realities. In *Twin Peaks*, Cooper was the only figure holding the fragments together (Botting & Wilson, 2001, p. 149), while in *Twin Peaks: The Return* even this certainty is taken away from the viewer: it is about many characters experiencing different planes of reality within different timelines.

The main story is divided into different storylines: the journey of "the good Dale" who tries to escape the Black Lodge and return to Twin Peaks; Dale Cooper's doppelgänger, Mr C. (Kyle MacLachlan), trying to avoid returning to the Black Lodge; the FBI investigation into Mr C., led by Major Garland Briggs; and the Twin Peaks Sheriff's Department investigation of Dale Cooper's disappearance 25 years before. Subplots are developed within these timelines: the relationship between 'Dougie' Jones (Kyle MacLachlan), his wife Janey-E (Naomi Watts) and his son Sonny Jim (Pierce Gagnon); the fantasy-like reality of Audrey Horne (Sherilyn Fenn);

[1] Phoebe Augustine, actress playing the role of Ronette Pulaski in *Twin Peaks*, is listed in IMDB as Woman in Club Silencio (uncredited). The correctness is disputed but it seems plausible that Lynch wanted some kind of reference to her and Laura Palmer, considering both the original project of *Mulholland Drive* as *Twin Peaks*' spin-off and the Club Silencio's similitude with the Red Room.

the love story between Big Ed (Everet McGill) and Norma Jennings (Peggy Lipton); the family issues of Shelly Briggs (Madchen Amick); and the story of Laura Palmer as Carrie Page.

The filmic space, originally based on the town of Twin Peaks, is now fragmented between Las Vegas, South Dakota, Washington, Twin Peaks and Odessa. Each of these places, in turn, are connected to a specific storyline: Dale Cooper/ Dougie Jones' story takes place in Las Vegas; Mr C. is in South Dakota; the FBI investigation in Washington; the investigation of Sheriff Truman's (Robert Foster)[2] office in Twin Peaks; and Carrie Page's timeline is in Odessa.

While the original series focused on Dale Cooper's gaze and *Fire Walk With Me* that of Laura Palmer, in *The Return* the gaze is completely fragmented among the storylines, and within each storyline among the characters, to the point of creating independent stories that the audience can follow separately. For instance, the storyline of Audrey and her husband Charlie (Clark Middleton), mostly confined to their house, as well as that of the isolated Twin Peaks community, never merges with the main plot except for on a few occasions. The resulting world is heterotopic, where there is a coexistence "of a 'large number of fragmentary possible worlds' or, more simply, incommensurable spaces that are juxtaposed or superimposed upon each other" (Harvey, 1992, p. 48).

Each storyline strongly depends on the points of view of the characters. The viewer learns what happens merely through the experience of each character and the intervention of an external gaze is almost absent. It is difficult to see an *intentio auctoris*, in the traditional meaning of transferring a unique point of view to spectator. On the contrary, it seems that Lynch tries to destroy any attempt by the viewer to create consistency and coherence due to an external eye, by excluding the concept of linear time and causality.

Questioning Causality: Time and Space

As viewers, we constantly are asked to reconsider what has happened and to try to recreate a logic between the parts that we saw previously. Besides the fragmented narration through different characters and places, Lynch does not maintain the linear temporality of events.

Dale Cooper's journey to leave the Lodge in Part 2 and 3 provides a starting point to understand this process. The narrative is alternatively edited according to the points of view of Dale Cooper in Black Lodge, Mr. C., and Dougie Jones. The three storylines gradually converge to the final point when Dale Cooper exits the Lodge taking the place of Dougie Jones; Dougie Jones enters the Red Room and is revealed to be a Tulpa;[3] Mr C. has a car accident and vomits Garmonbozia[4]. The sequence of events is one of the most intelligible in the entire series, but it introduces some techniques used by Lynch throughout the season, to destroy the linearity of time and causality. First, the change of point of view shows the viewer what the three characters are experiencing at the same time. Second, the convergence of events through common elements such as Garmonbozia and the curtains of Red Room/Black Lodge seen by all of them. Finally, the expansion of the time, causing the events to happen in one minute in the diegetic time (from 2:52 – 2:53) but about 23 minutes in filmic time.

[2] Sheriff Truman is no more Harry (Michael Ontkean) but his brother Frank (Robert Forster).
[3] Tulpa is a concept of Eastern philosophy. It is an autonomous entity created with the power of mind. In *Twin Peaks: The Return*, Tulpas are created by Lodge inhabitants, combining the hair of a person and a small golden sphere through the use of electricity.
[4] Garmonbozia is creamed corn composed of "pain and sorrow" as referenced in *Fire Walk With Me.* It is created by the pain and suffering of the victims of the Black Lodge and is the food of its inhabitants.

While these sequences still maintain a continuity of events, albeit on different planes, others do not follow the same linearity. For instance, in Part 12, Diane receives a message ("Las Vegas?") from Mr. C. but the viewer sees Mr C. sending this message in Part 15. Furthermore, the time on Diane's mobile is 19.28 while Mr C.'s indicates 9:34pm. So, apparently, Diane receives the message before Mr. C. sends it. In addition to reversing the temporal sequence of events, different timelines lead the viewer to question whether these sequences are part of the same reality.

Time reference is one of the elements used by Lynch to deconstruct the linearity. 2:53, for example, occurs in different Parts, sequentially distant one from another. The time is announced by The Arm to Cooper before Cooper's fall from the Black Lodge ("2:53 time and time again"), it is also one of the elements connecting different parts and storylines of the season. In addition to corresponding to the moment when Dale Cooper returns as Dougie Jones, this is the time shown in Part 14 when Sheriff's officers find Naido (Nae), the woman without eyes seen falling in space while trying to help Dale Cooper in the Purple Room. Since the events of the Purple Room in Part 3 appear to take place between 2:52 and 2:53, we wonder whether Naido is found merely after her fall in Part 3. The same doubt arises when in Part 17, the time shown on the clock in Truman's office loops between 2:52 and 2:53, although the events might have happened in different days.

The uncertainty of time and causality is directly suggested by One Armed Man/Mike (Al Strobel) in Part 2 and Part 18 when, in Black Lodge, he asks Cooper: "Is it future or is it past?". Through this question Mike casts doubt on the linearity of events. In both Parts, a time loop is shown resetting all the sequences, emphasizing the fact that what happened might happen in the future or might have already happened in the past.

Questioning Reality: "Who is the Dreamer?"

Twin Peaks: The Return develops the dream logic explored in *Lost Highway* and *Mulholland Drive*. Following the path taken with *Inland Empire* (Lynch, 2006), the third season reveals further the paradox of Zhuang-Zi through Gordon Cole (David Lynch) telling his 'Monica Bellucci Dream' in Part 14. In the dream, the Italian actress asks Director Cole: "We are like the dreamer who dreams, and then lives inside the dream. But who is the dreamer?"

The dream logic is what shapes the narrative of *Twin Peaks: The Return*, through elements such as Teapot-looking Philip Jeffries, the Purple Room, and the experimental Part 8. Part 17 and 18, moreover, blur the boundaries between dream and reality, making it impossible to identify the truth, and leading the viewer to question all certainties.

An overlaid image of Cooper appears in Part 17, while Cooper in the scene talks to his friends gathered in Truman's office in Twin Peaks. 'Overlaid Cooper', with a deeply distorted voice, says: "We live inside a dream", evoking what Phillip Jeffries (David Bowie) said in *Fire Walk With Me* and Gordon Cole's Monica Bellucci dream. The origin of the overlaid image is debated among critics and there is no consensus, but the image suggests an external gaze suspended between different realities as an observing third eye.

This hypothesis may be supported since the superimposition is maintained through different scenes, as if another Dale Cooper was observing the events from a distance, leading the viewer to assume that Cooper is the dreamer. At the same time, the continuous switch between places and planes of reality questions this assumption. Indeed, superimposed Cooper is seen even after

the blackout when Cooper, Diane and Gordon Cole walk into the Great Northern Hotel towards the door of room 315, but he disappears when Cooper meets Mike and enters the Convenience Store. Lynch does not explain, how and why Dale Cooper, Gordon Cole and Diane arrive in the dark corridor after the blackout in Sheriff Truman's office but in this transition, he maintains the image of 'Overlaid Cooper'. The narrative merely suggests the possibility of a dream through the loop of the clock between 2:52 and 2:53 in the Sheriff's office, the superimposed image of Cooper, and the transformation of Naido into Diane. At the same time, Lynch does not give any clue to distinguish the reality and the dream state, recalling the paradox of Zhuang Zi.

The paradox is reinforced in Part 18. Crossing the 430-miles threshold, Cooper and Diane enter a new dimension where Cooper becomes Richard and Diane becomes Linda. When Cooper reads the letter left by Diane, signed as Linda, he seems surprised to see different names and he seems to question his own identity, as Zhuang Zi does.

In the new plane of reality all the clues given throughout the season assume other meanings: the malevolent being Judy[5] becomes the name of a restaurant, Laura Palmer is now Carrie Page and the Palmer's house in Twin Peaks is inhabited by the Tremonds/Chalfonts. These new meanings seem to support the theory that all the events in Twin Peaks were a dream/fantasy of Richard/Cooper. However, Lynch, prevents the viewer from considering it as the ultimate conclusion. Indeed, Richard/Cooper continues to qualify himself as FBI Agent Dale Cooper; Carrie Page seems to recall her past when Richard/Cooper mentions Laura's mother Sarah Palmer (Grace Zabriskie) and she hears her voice coming from the Tremonds/Chalfonts' house. The final scream of Carrie Page, the blackout and Cooper's question "What year is this?" connect this plane of reality to specific moments of the season: Carrie's scream recalls Laura's when she is taken from the Red Room and from the forest after being saved by Cooper; the blackout recalls the one that happened in Truman's office (Part 17); and Dale's time dilemma reinforces the question "Is it Future or is it past?"

Twin Peaks: The Return can be defined as the highest level of Lynch's filmography that deconstructs reality. Not only does it blend different dimensions, but it also drives viewers to continuously recreate realities due to the impossibility of identifying a consistent and coherent plot. Furthermore, it encourages viewers to create a custom film experience. It is a narrative where everyone can combine elements and create their own interpretation that will be unique and valid at the same time. Not being oriented and limited by an external gaze, there is no more a single interpretation that invalidates others.

Conclusion

In David Lynch's films, the aim is not to perceive an objective reality represented through an external gaze third-party's point of view, in the form of other characters or the camera's gaze. Viewers follow the point of view and mental representations of the main characters. So even though the films put forward a reality that the main characters must confront, this confrontation with a harsher reality is portrayed through a dreamy narrative, a fragmented dramatic structure and a superimposition of different worlds. When the reality built by the character collapses, the viewers do not have the objective gaze of the camera or the narrator to guide them through a distinction between reality and fantasy.

[5] Judy is mentioned for the first time by Phillip Jeffries in Fire Walk With Me and then by Gordon Cole in Part 14. Judy is seen in Part 8 as the "mother" of Bob, the evil spirit who possesses Leland Palmer (Ray Wise) in the first two seasons and gets defeated in Part 17.

In *Mulholland Drive* or *Lost Highway* some scenes, with their parody-like feel, are hinted to be just a fantasy or to belong to the fictitious universe of cinema and then to our collective imaginary. In *Lost Highway* Alice, who is the transformation of Renee, seems to be a pastiche of film noir femme fatales. The love story between Alice, the lover of the "Godfather" Mr. Eddy, and Pete, a mechanic recalls melodramas. Alice, as a femme fatale, and Mr. Eddy, as a godfather, are cliché representations rooted in classical Hollywood genres. The closeup of the red lips of Alice speaking into the phone punctuates the sense of mystery characterizing the femme fatale. The use of slow-motion, when Alice gets out of the car accompanied by the music and Pete's contemplative gaze, indicates love at first sight. Those images indicate cinematographic versions of reality based on collective imaginary. As underlined previously, in *Mulholland Drive* Betty's audition scene presents a similar overconstructed of the same constructed universe. The awakened Cooper in *Twin Peaks: The Return* seems almost a parody of Dale Cooper from the original series with his overenthusiastic attitude.

There is no such thing as the objective gaze of the camera either; camera's gaze is constructed through the reality of the character although we are sometimes given illusionary high-angle shots and shots from points of view of the side characters. *Lost Highway*, *Mulholland Drive* and *Twin Peaks: The Return* offer us elements that give the illusion of an external gaze. The detectives, guardians, and federal agents who are supposed to represent an objective and external point of view, as in the modern and classical detective and noir narrative, might be considered parts of fantasies or reconstructed realities.

In David Lynch's films even when we are shown an awakening of the character, this awakening does not signify the collapse of an artificial world and the encounter with material reality in a strict sense. Even the awakening is told in dream logic or makes part of reconstructed reality that looks like a fantasy. This recalls the paradox of Zhuang Zi: Zhuang Zi is living a paradox since he does not have an external gaze that defines the distinction between reality and fantasy, hence his true identity. In other words, both the butterfly that dreams of being Zhuang Zi or Zhuang Zi who dreams of being a butterfly are valid planes of reality.

Even if we consider some storylines as parts of dream/fantasy or having dream logic in terms of space and time relations, these dreamlike or illusionary realities seem to continue overlapping the daily life and are perceived more real than fiction or fantasy by the main characters. From this perspective the vagabond-like creature who lives behind the wall at Winkie's in *Mulholland Drive*, and Mystery Man who records Fred's house and helps him to kill Dick Laurent/Mr. Eddy have an existence and signification beyond the fictitious creations of a schizophrenic character, since the worlds that appear to be fantasy commingle with the other realities. At this stage it is void to ask whether the suicide of Diane/Betty in *Mulholland Drive* or the murder of Renee in *Lost Highway* took place or not. None of the elements in these films are relevant to the distinction between reality and fantasy; the reality of the film is the fragmented one in which the main character lives. This could also be said about *Twin Peaks: The Return.* The main point is not to distinguish clearly whether Laura Palmer's murder has been deleted from the past since Phillip Jeffries himself mentions to Cooper an unofficial version. The distinction is not between fantasy and reality, but between the official and unofficial version. We see different timelines or different planes of reality related to Dale Cooper: Cooper as Dougie, Richard, Cooper as an overlaid entity, the possibility of the awakened Cooper being another manufactured double.

Even if we consider some parts of the films to be dream or fantasy in the strict sense, it is clear that they are represented as dreams and fantasies of cinematic narration. The fantasy is not

narrated through a strict distinction from reality and without an external gaze. Here, the question is rather: How would a certain reality seem if it was narrated as if it was a filmic dreaminess? Here we deal with storylines constructed as if they were some states of filmic fantasy. To put it another way, Lynch shows us how it would be if a story (or a part of a story) was narrated as if it was a different plane of reality. That's why it may be too restrictive to see Lynch's films as a director's self-indulgent product of postmodern times. His films show that there is more than one way to construct and re-construct reality. In *Lost Highway* Fred Madison explains to the detectives why he doesn't own a camera; he tells them he likes to remember things in his own way, not necessarily the way they happened. This explanation could also frame Lynch's narratives. As viewers we are shown the stories "the way the main characters remember them" and we don't have an external gaze to show us "necessarily the way things happened". Throughout each of the films the camera also 'remembers' and shows things the way they are reconstructed. That is why in Lynch's films the colliding worlds could not be described simply through deliriums of some clinically schizophrenic characters, since schizophrenia assumes an external, material reality in which the fantasy or alternate reality is well distinguished and contained.

In *Twin Peaks: The Return* Audrey who seems to be stuck in a reality, asks her husband: "What story is that, Charlie? Is it the story of the little girl who lived down the lane? Is it?", which is the same question asked by The Arm to Cooper. Here it makes sense to recall Gordon Cole's dream where Monica Bellucci says: "We are like the dreamer who dreams and then lives inside the dream. But who is the dreamer?". We never know whose story this is exactly or who the dreamer is, since there is no external gaze or point of view that reveals the dreamer or the storyteller. Cooper says "We live inside a dream" but as in the paradox of Zhuang, the dream is neither something artificial, nor something that would be cancelled with the revelation of a certain reality. The dream or fantasy is just another way of constructing the reality. We live inside a dream, but we never perceive the awakening since both the reality of the butterfly and the one of Zhuang Zi are experienced as real. And "the story of the little girl who lived down by the lane" could be told the way the characters remember them.

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The Chronicle of Yerevan Days: Spatial Representation and Authentic Realism

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Abstract:

This article offers an insight into how space is represented in the feature film *The Chronicle of Yerevan Days* (Dovlatyan, 1972). I examine the film's unmediated and minimally mediated spatial presentation of the actual city of Yerevan – its buildings and streets etc. I claim that, in narrating the fictional story, the mise-en-scène and cinematography emphasize the city's spaces. The manner in which the buildings, streets, and squares are highlighted suggests that the city acts as an agent. I use Koppelhoff's (2012) theory of "diegetic space," Alter's (2005) idea of "mythographer," and da Costa's (2015) notion of the urban environment as mise-en-scène to argue that authentic realism arises from the deployment in real time of the city as an agent in *The Chronicle of Yerevan Days*.

At the core of my argument lies the claim that the film's narrative integrates objective documentary narration with fictional storytelling. The mise-en-scène and cinematography selectively represent details and fragments of city spaces and buildings, which equip the represented city with a certain agency. In this function, the city interacts with the human characters. My claim about authentic realism stems from the fact that the buildings, streets, and squares in the film are historically accurate in function. This creates for the viewer an intense familiarity. Also, by virtue of their historical and cultural values, the represented buildings and streets contextualize the story as Armenian, infusing a sense of authenticity into the characters and their actions.

Keywords: film narrative, spatial narrative, realism, film and architecture, location filming

Introduction

This article examines the use of spatial narrative in the film *The Chronicle of Yerevan Days* (Dovlatyan, 1972) – specifically, the employment of exterior cinematography and location filming – and argues that authentic realism arises from a particular use of this narrative technique. In the film, the narrative discourse systematically draws the viewer's attention to the built heritage and streets of Yerevan – the capital of Armenia. City spaces open the narrative and reappear consistently, and a panoramic view of the city closes the film. There are scenes and sequences where the action could have been set in the interior, but the particular choices call for a reading of the story with reference to the physical Yerevan city of 1972. This consistency suggests that the spatial narrative device is used intentionally.

Based on the assumption of a specific intent regarding the use of architecture in the film, I claim that the actual city functions as a narrative agent in the film. The film's narrative strategy integrates buildings, streets and squares into the dramatic action and represents them in their historically accurate functions. The effect is that Yerevan emerges as a character that advances the narrative through interacting with the human characters. In the role of a character, Yerevan represents history – more specifically, recorded history. Further, I propose that the cultural-social value of the represented buildings and streets authenticates the fictional story as genuinely Armenian. The character of Yerevan embodies Armenian history and Armenian built heritage and develops the thematic thread of recorded history.

According to Hermann Kappelhoff (2012), the current neo-formalist critique employs the concept of diegetic space or plot space to explain the process of the spectator's interpretation of the realistic quality of the cinematic image. The parameters of filmic spatial construction coincide with vectors that control spatial orientation in real life conditions. And this coincidence allows the cinematic image to be perceived as "a continual series of plot events," in other words "the image space" translated "into a realistic plot space" (Kappelhoff, 2012, p. 1). Kappelhoff's theory corroborates my claim that Dovlatyan emphasizes the image of the city's spaces with actual pedestrians, traffic, and sound in the narrative discourse to convey the idea that Yerevan is a character. Maria H. B da Costa's (2015) theory is also about city acting as an agent in film, differentiating between "true city movie" and "urban local color movie." In the former, "the city actively participates in shaping character and plot," (p. 107) while in the latter, a change in the setting has no effect on the constituents of the narrative.

The distinction between the story world and the real world becomes insignificant in *The Chronicle of Yerevan Days*. The location filming and the documentary narration of the city's life make the cinematic city and the real city identical. What springs from this recognition is that the fictional story is authentically Armenian because it is drawn on a politically, socially, historically and architecturally genuine environment. Da Costa (2015) says that to understand what city is, it is necessary to study the full scope of its constitution – physical, sociological, political and economic. "A cinematic city is constituted by references to real cities and is a space represented by film through the construction of different notions of motion" (p. 106). She argues that urban environment can function as a narrative itself, and in that role it serves as a space within the film that expresses meaning. However, she continues saying that the fabricated city in the film narrative is not "freed from the influence of its real counterpart" because reality affects our perception of forms in culture (pp. 106–11).

My argument and the theory I have used cohere with criticism in film studies regarding the concept of cinematic city and, in particular, the representation of architecture in film. Carsten

Strathausen (2003) discusses how two "city films" *The Symphony of a Great City* (Ruttmann, 1927) and *Man with a Movie Camera* (Vertov, 1929) deploy everyday images and montage to characterize the modern city as an empty and alienating living space (pp. 15–41). Tyrus Miller (2003) explains how post World War II (WWII) Central and Eastern European films create spaces of "resistance to totalitarianism" imposed by Nazism and Stalinism and its implications (pp. 80–100). Jessie Labov (2003) investigates how selective use of city fragments in *Dekalog* (Kieslowski, 1988) aims at undermining the Soviet state by "withdrawing from the realm of politics into the resistant practice of everyday life" (pp. 113–37). Mark Shiel's (2003) examination of Italian Neorealism in terms of the concept of cinematic city reveals that the Italian filmmakers of this period used location filming, real-life events, specific streets and buildings (used by the film's real-life subjects) in their pursuit after authenticity. "Documentary-life objectivity" and "manipulation of time and space" were characteristic conventions of achieving authenticity via location filming. Thematically, neorealism focused on city in terms of the process of modernization, representing it as a metaphor for progress and achievement, but also ruin (pp. 11–16). Mitchell Schwarzer (2000) surveys Antonioni's films in terms of the latter's extensive use of architecture. Schwarzer claims that architecture in his films has a narrative agency manifested in its contribution to the plot, interaction with characters and objects, and figuring as protagonist and antagonist. Particularly in *The Night* (1960), but also in his other films, Antonioni deploys streets, facades, terraces, towers and other fragments of city's built heritage to convey various thematic oppositions – ancient vs modern, turmoil vs order, crowds and silence, historicism and the modern (Schwarzer, 2000, p. 198).

The Story

The Chronicle of Yerevan Days surveys an episode from the routine of Yerevan in 1972, the then capital of Soviet Armenia. The events in the film tell the last days of Armen's (Khoren Abrahamyan) life. Armen is a forty-year-old clerk working at the National Archives of Armenia – henceforth referred to as the NAA – who has access to the chronicled history of the city and its residents. Armen helps the NAA clients – petitioners – to retrieve historical facts and biographical data, sometimes taking recourse to illegal measures. Armen's best friends, Karen (Leonard Sarkisov) and Ruben (Armen Ayvazyan), understand him, but also blame him for being overly compassionate towards strangers. Working in the NAA has made Armen mentally distraught. The public archives often reveal information that complicates the citizens' lives instead of improving their social wellbeing and condition. A teenage boy's (unidentified) stepfather (Robert Martirosyan), a man in his 50s, wants to see the letter his adopted son's biological father wrote upon giving the baby away to a foster home. Seeing the stepfather's despaired anticipation of losing his only child, Armen burns the letter. The teenage boy's biological father sues Armen, and Armen gets fired from the NAA.

Anahit (Julietta Avagyan), who is engaged to a middle-aged man (unidentified) seeks restoration of her true family name, which is unknown because her parents were killed in WWII. Armen cannot help her, because no document in the NAA archives is preserved, and the last witness, an Armenian soldier named Vahram Rshtuni (unidentified), who may have known her parents was sentenced to death for espionage. An old woman petitioner (Elena Khudabashyan) requests a certificate from Armen that she has worked as a national parkland security. An old man petitioner (unidentified) wants Armen to provide him with a work certificate to the effect that he worked as a Chief of Kolhoz in Morut Village in 1930. Armen finds a legally dubious way to help the old woman. He refuses to help the old man, but the latter's comment "You're a good man, you will give me the document" suggests that Armen will most probably use a loophole in the law to help the old man, too.

In the relationship line, Armen courts Anahit and they fall in love. Anahit breaks up with her fiancé. Armen investigates Anahit's story privately. Ruben who is a war veteran pulls strings in the War Veterans' Committee and finds the State Attorney, Hayk Smbatyan (Gurgen Janibekyan), who sentenced Rshtuni to death during the war. Armen forces Smbatyan to reveal the truth, and the retired attorney confesses he and his colleagues made a mistake of sentencing Rhstuni to death, because they didn't believe Rshtuni's story according to which he had become a war prisoner and then escaped. Later Rshtuni's story was proved to be true. Armen accuses Smbatyan of keeping the story about Rshtuni and his connection with Anahit a secret. What ensues is Armen's marriage to Anahit, his discharge from the NAA and his sudden death that concludes the story.

In the context of the crucial political and social changes the Armenian people underwent in the first half of the 20th century, the role of the NAA, which contains documents and records concerning the social, political, cultural history of Armenia, is significant. The personal histories of Armenians living in this period were affected by political turmoil that befell Transcaucasia[1] at the turn of the 20th century. The following had had an excruciating impact on the lives of Armenians: the absence of a national state; the division of Armenia among the Ottoman Empire, the Russian Empire and Persia; the Armenian Genocide; the establishing of the first Armenian Republic, which after two years succumbed to Bolshevik pressure and was annexed to the USSR; and last but not least, the severe population loss during WWII. In *The Chronicle of Yerevan Days*, Yerevanites suffer from lost or unknown identities and seek restoration and completion of their biological and biographical data. The NAA should be the institution where an individual can piece their identity together and legitimately claim his or her civic rights. Ironically, the truth told by the archives is cruel.

On the thematic level, the film juxtaposes recorded history and memory to explore the past, and shows how human destiny may depend on the dynamics between the two. Armen's function is to fill the missing gaps in residents' biographies; thus, his character serves as a nexus between the past and the present. Yerevan is embodied in the architecture, in particular the NAA building, and acts as an antagonist to Armen. This narrative conflict translates into the subthemes of individual agency versus the monumentality of history, and memory versus recorded history. The agency Yerevan exerts as a character imbues the fictional story with the history of Armenia and makes the story of Armen and Anahit genuinely Armenian. The film alludes to the history of Armenia through the representation of the Armenian Genocide Monument, the History Museum of Armenia, and the Hovhannes Tumanyan Museum, evoking the tumultuous history of Armenia via associations with atrocity and loss. Like any Armenian, Armen's mind is burdened with the past of his nation, but his attempts to delete his and Anahit's memories about their past are doomed. Nevertheless, Armen partially restores Anahit's identity; their marriage redefines her persona. He leaves the NAA and they start a new life together. One morning, Armen goes shopping and accidentally dies from a heart attack in the street. His death incident suggests that the past, especially the history of Armenia, is monolithic, heavy, and indelible. Its pressure on Armen's psyche gives him a heart attack, and he falls down and dies in Mashtots Avenue.

[1] A geopolitical region in the vicinity of the southern Caucasus Mountains on the border of Eastern Europe and Western Asia.

The Narrative Strategy

The Cinematic Narrative Technique

The Chronicle of Yerevan Days deploys a narrative system that constructs the diegetic world via images of space consisting of two layers: real and fictive. The former is the raw material that is unmediated, whereas the latter is the aestheticizing implication conveyed by particular techniques of cinematography and mise-en-scène. I base my claim on two modes of perception – pragmatic and aesthetic, which relate to "real" and "fictive" respectively. The images of the built heritage have a dual effect on the viewer. First, we see that the narrative documents the city as if in an actual moment in 1972. This real layer familiarizes the viewer with the city, locates the viewer in a historical real time and space, and describes the life in Yerevan in 1972. Second, the fictive layer, which provides aesthetic commentary on the images, is constructed through the cinematic synthesis of the fictional narrative (plot and characters) with the built heritage of Yerevan. Throughout the film, the fictional story and the documentary representation of Yerevan complement each other.

Presented below are several cinematic narrative techniques employed in the film that support the argument that there is a distinction between documenting life in Yerevan and telling a fictional story in the film narrative, which subsequently coveys the idea that city acts as an agent.

1. The establishing shots articulate buildings (the NAA, the Armenian Genocide Monument, and the Republican Clinical Hospital). The closing shots, too, show buildings with no characters.
2. The long shots and framing are deployed to focus the narrative on the buildings. The characters are either small against the buildings' vast backdrop, or they are in the background of a building detail.
3. The tracking and following shots create a sense of naturalism. The camera's view of Anahit is blocked by traffic and passersby. The cut to another street is determined by the traffic blocking the audience's view. Random pedestrians and traffic enter shots, and, as the camera does not keep focused on the characters, the viewer's attention is drawn to passersby and on lookers, the real-time city sounds and the speech of passersby, specific stretches of the given streets, and fragments of buildings.
4. The exterior location shooting prompts the viewer (especially the local viewer) to reconstruct action and plot events in the diegetic world within the off-screen space.
5. The opening and closing shots feature Yerevan. The film begins by narrating dawn in Yerevan through a montage of city spaces. The finale is composed of a montage of still shots of windows that ends with a panoramic view of Yerevan at dawn.

The interplay between the real and the fictive in the film narrative suggests that we associate the real (the unmediated representation of the city) with the capital of Soviet Armenia in 1972 and consider the actual functions of the buildings and streets. The fictive layer (Armen's story) may be linked with the artistic value of the built heritage of historical Yerevan. The film plays out this opposition through photographic compositions where Armen and the city enter an uncanny relationship. Koppelhoff (2012) argues that spatial constructions inherently carry semantic potential and that aesthetically reflexive spatialization ignores this potential. Cinema cannot capture reality in its entirety; instead a cinematographic image "frames the passing moment of a material reality" (p. 1). In the film *The Chronicle of Yerevan Days*, the particular cinematography and mise-en-scène do stylize the representation of spaces. However, the appearances of buildings and streets of historical and cultural significance give the images a

special semantic charge. Thus, both the cinematic narrative mode and the particular architecture are combined in the continuous framing of images of city spaces.

In a few instances, the film narrative switches to Armen's subjective point of view. The viewer interprets the images of the city through his perspective. This strategy enables the viewer to understand Armen's mental state through interpretations of the way the city architecture is presented. However, the viewer can also see the city spaces independent of Armen's point of view. Thus the viewer also figures as a "realist witness" (Alter, 2005, p. 10). Both Armen and the viewer "see" the city as it was in 1972; at the same time Armen and the viewer apperceive the city because Dovlatyan deploys a remarkable spatial narrative technique specifically for aesthetic commentary.

Robert Alter (2005) puts forth the ideas of "mythographer" and "realist witness" in *Imagined Cities* discussing the representation of city in fiction. He claims Flaubert's representation of city is executed via the consciousness of a particular character, not just a disinterested spectator (p. 10). Flaubert shows the link between protagonist's consciousness and the nature of the city (p. 13). In another instance, Alter (2005) discusses "the voice of Paris awakening" as a representation of the city in Flaubert's novel *Sentimental Education* (p. 14). This feature is rampant in the film's narrative when the viewer can hear the traffic noise, honks, and pedestrians' chatter. It is most vividly expressed in the backyard scene. In this scene, while Armen and Karen get in Armen's car, we hear a woman (an actual tenant in the apartment block) call her son, off screen, repeating his name "Arturik" (Russianized pronunciation of the name Arthur).

In the following I discuss the use of particular streets and buildings to illustrate how space is used as a meaning-making device in *The Chronicles of Yerevan Days*. I have subsumed the examples of city fragments under three categories of city space, buildings, and windows, because this organization of discussion foregrounds the use of city as a narrative agent, which, it may be suggested, was the filmmaker's intention.

City Ambience: Streets and Squares

The city participates in structuring the scenes that are set in streets and squares. Firstly, the exterior city scenes display the daily routines of Yerevanites in 1972, showing the pedestrians, cars, trolley-buses, and taxis that happen to be going by while Armen goes about his business. The streets have the same names as today – a Yerevanite watching this film 40 years on can easily recognize where the action is taking place. Secondly, the exterior shots, where much of the dramatic action is staged, carry the plot. By virtue of their dominance over the interior spaces, the city's spaces contain and direct the dramatic action and guide the viewer to locate themselves in and navigate across the city "in real time".

It is noteworthy to mention that the architecture of modern Yerevan is a unique mixture of various styles – ancient, medieval and classical. The plan of the present day city was designed by Alexander Tamanyan at the beginning of the 1920s (Azatyan, 2013, p. 25) who revived the ancient Armenian architecture by composing the city plan based on those in the medieval era (streets and squares) and designed the first buildings in the spirit of medieval Armenian architecture with elements of Russian classicism (Azatyan, 2013, p. 26). The following buildings which appear in the film – the National History Museum, the Baghramyan Avenue residential apartment block, the Academy of Sciences, the Tumanyan Museum – combine the traditional Armenian architecture and Russian classicism in a modernist way.

The streets and squares that appear in the narrative have been well-known for their historical significance. The Khanjyan, Nalbandyan (15th century A.D.), Baghramyan, and Sayat Nova (1860s) streets, as well as Sakharov Square and Republic Square (1930s) exist today and have always been the major commuting and commercial venues, and cultural landmarks of Yerevan. Tamanyan's vision and his successors' views and practices have shaped a unique image of Yerevan. This historical knowledge defines the spatial narrative in the film, which in turn enhances understanding of the fictional story with respect to the themes of the past, recorded history and memory. Barnes and Duncan (1992) believe that meaning is produced via intertextuality, a theory in which reality can be an image, a concept and so on, that defines physical elements. They conclude that creating a film is constitutive, namely the old world is the basis of a new world (cited in da Costa, 2015, p. 106).

Da Costa (2015) suggests that using the city's topography is a way of creating the urban environment as mise-en-scène. This strategy articulates movement, which allows the viewer to visualize the cityscape (pp. 108–9). Likewise, Siegfried Kracauer (1997) explains why cinema pays so much attention to the street: "A street serving as background to some quarrel or love affair may rush to the fore and produce an intoxicating effect" (cited in Pratt & San Juan, 2014, p. 23) He believes that street has two functions in a film – to advance the narrative and reveal a moment of "a visible reality" that has a certain indeterminate meaning. He further develops his argument by saying that there is a constant enfolding of the real and the fictive in a film – a process, through which the real emerges in unexpected ways. A film presents the real in fragmented ways, and fragments within film depend on chance and carry something that is not sewn perfectly into the narrative coherence of the film (cited in Pratt & San Juan, 2014, pp. 23–4).

Many scenes in the narrative document the city's life. The film opens on Khanjyan Street, with probably the first tram out on its route. It is a long shot composed of city spaces and Mount Ararat rising over Yerevan in the far. The shot provides a picture for the city's broader geography with the high-rise apartment blocks, the tall wide lamp posts, the tram tracks in the middle and occasional traffic on the right. The shots of Sakharov Square, a place revisited a few times, characterize Yerevan by capturing the kvass tanker and the phone booth in front of the parking space outside the NAA building (locals may recall how they bought kvass and used the phone in the past). In the sequence where Armen approaches Anahit and asks her to go on a date, he walks in Tumanyan Street with the traffic obstructing the audience's view. When he spots Anahit and tries to cross the street to chat her up, his point of view of her is blocked by trolley-buses and passersby. Another street scene where the viewer can see a typical afternoon on Nalbandyan Street is the one where Anahit slaps her fiancé – the shots have captured two women talking, a man chatting up a woman, another man probably observing the filming process.

The characters' movement through streets in the film is realistic and because of this "real" Yerevan puts certain "confines" upon the characters by directing their activity. The real time representation of Yerevan also involves the viewer participating in the action. Since the viewer knows exactly where they are, the viewer engages in the action, as if live. The following scenes illuminate this: Armen and Karen driving to the Republican Clinical Hospital; Armen following Anahit in Abovyan Street; Armen and Anahit's taxi ride to Spring Street; Armen helping the old woman petitioner; Armen walking across the city at the end. The effects of Yerevan directing the characters' actions and the viewer's direct engagement in the action are especially remarkable in two sequences, one showing Armen and Karen driving to the hospital and the other – Armen and Ahanit riding to Spring Street in a taxi. In the former, as Armen

drives down Baghramyan Street, the camera shows an apartment blocks on the right side. A Yerevanite knows they're going towards the juncture with Orbeli Street and that from there they're going to turn right to go to the hospital. In this way, 'real' Yerevan shapes the dramatic action, and the viewer realistically locates Armen and the events of his life. In the other sequence, the taxi driver is having problems with finding Spring Street. As we navigate through the city with Armen and Anahit in the taxi, first we are on Azatoutyun Avenue, then Baghramyan Street, then at the ropeway on Koryun Street, finally at an unrecognizable construction site. The taxi driver enumerates the existing street names and then stops by a police station to inquire after a street named Spring. Armen does not know of such a street. He has asked the taxi driver to take them to Spring Street with the intention to make Anahit happy and mark their relationship with some meaning. They end up in a street that is under construction.

In the wedding feast sequence, the procession of the party, consisting of Armen, Anahit, Karen, Ruben and a group of musicians playing on pipes and a drum, passes through by-streets and courtyards. The setting, difficult to recognize due to night shots, is in one of the neighborhoods in the city center. It is composed of medieval-style buildings with high arcs and narrow winding streets, again typical of medieval cities. Following the reveling party, the viewer experiences a brief mysterious tour of an ancient-like city.

Yerevan not only directs the characters' actions and activity, but also shows its various characteristic features, which contributes to its narrative agency. The street shooting describes the urban spaces by showing the typical habits of Yerevanites, who use streets and squares for discussions, conversations, arguments, business, dealing with personal issues, and making love. In the sequence where Armen drives Karen to hospital, the latter advises Armen to get married, saying "A married man will not do follies," referring to Armen's burning of the document certifying the biological father's relationship to the teenage boy. The camera shows the flitting facades of the residential buildings through the car's windshield. The actual rush hour street hurry-scurry and the traffic racket are seamlessly sewn with the character's private lives, reconfiguring the public areas of Yerevan city as a space where personal matters are usually discussed.

At one point, the narrative also shows the business side of Yerevan. In that scene, where Armen resolves the old woman's petitioner issue, they go up and down Nalbandyan Street, walk in a bistro, where Armen makes a call to a friend in the government. Then they walk out and stroll down the street. Characteristically, Armen and the old woman petitioner are presented in long shots and the viewer cannot see their faces. Thus it is the street, busy with trolley buses blocking the camera view, pedestrians walking by, and the fragments of the NAA building that is in the focus. At another moment, when Armen and Anahit end up at a construction site, the narrative discloses the ugly side of the city. The site implies the 'ruins' of Anahit's identity, equipping Yerevan (metaphorically the history of Armenia) with another dimension.

In a few scenes, the city's agency escalates the conflict between individual and history. This is remarkable in scenes that are set in squares. In two scenes, one set in Republic Square, the other in Sakharov Square, the squares contain the dramatic action. In the scene, where Armen is driving the widow (whose husband died in hospital) home, he stops the car in Republic Square at her request. Seen from an aerial perspective in the dawn, the square is empty, and her steps echo in the huge square designed in the spirit of medieval architecture. The empty square underscores the bereft woman's despair. She is small in the empty square, and the huge pillars of the National Museum of History tower over her. When the woman takes a drink from

the floral-shaped water fountain, the fountain – a piece of sculpture wrought in stone, a characteristic feature of the architecture of Yerevan – occupies the center of the shot. The camera remains static on the water fountain, while in the background Armen helps the woman get in the car. In the same shot, the arcs of the government building form the background. The scene shows the vulnerability of humans in the face of built heritage. This scene is also a good example of how Yerevan incarnates the history of Armenia that speaks through the representation of national cultural heritage.

In the scene in Sakharov Square, the mise-en-scène is highly casual, and the shots are packed with images of city space. This brings forward the city's agency by highlighting its historical-cultural heritage. The camera follows Armen as he sneaks into his car. Only Armen's head is seen behind the parked cars as he stealthily approaches his vehicle, while the viewer can see more details of the other parked cars. Armen spots a family (an old couple and their adopted teenage son) arguing, three small figures standing against the façade of unique stonework of a Nalbandyan Street apartment block, whose pinkish color and the décor evoke a palace. At this moment, Yerevan acts as an antagonist, which is articulated in two ways. First, via a medium shot, the dramatic action is interfered by the following details: the apartment block building with the ground floor shop with high arc-windows; the kvass tanker; the employees' and/or visitors' parked cars; a random car pulling into the parking area and blocking the viewer's and the family's point of view of Armen. There is a sense that the city complicates the characters' lives. Second, we hear only the sounds of Yerevan, whereas the voices of the despairing family are muted. Before this scene the action has already raised the curiosity of the viewer, and the latter is eager to hear the heated conversation. The traffic racket does not allow the viewer to hear what the stepfather says to his wife and adopted son. Thus the reality obscures the fiction.

The agency of the city is brought to a climax in a 4-minute sequence, as the film draws to an end. Armen goes shopping beneath the actual sounds of Yerevan. As the sequence starts, the camera tracks Armen's movement across the city. At the Sayat-Nova and Nalbandyan intersection he is about to get hit by a car, lost in thought. Incidentally, the camera frames the widow, showing her from Armen's point of view. As she crosses Sayat Nova, she and Armen exchange glances. Keeping up Armen's point of view, the camera tracks the woman in shots gradually moving from medium to close-ups. Suddenly, again incidentally, the camera cuts to Rshtuni's picture in a newspaper posted on a bulletin board (that used to be installed at certain points in Yerevan). By virtue of its urban plan Yerevan helps expand the narrative from Armen's action to include actual details. Both the woman and the bulletin board are part of Yerevan and happen to cross paths with Armen. Fiction, actual historical moment, and past history all intersect, working through the protagonist's confused strolling across the city.

Then in an aerial shot Armen approaches the Mashtots Avenue and Isahakyan Street intersection: here, he decides to walk down Mashtots Avenue on the left side, past the grocery shop and the phone box (familiar to the local viewer). This is where he suddenly has a heart attack and dies in the midst of a crowd. The scene is presented in a very naturalistic style through following close-up shots and then crane shots shifting to close-ups of on-lookers' faces and Armen lying on the ground. The crowd surrounds Armen, one man rubs his chest, a glass of water passes hands. A paramedic arrives and checks Armen's pulse and eyes, and a voice from the crowd asks "Dead?" followed by a grunting "Yeah."

Buildings

The National Archives of Armenia

The narrative discourse uses the NAA building, a historically accurate government organization, as an axis around which the plot action revolves. Today, it is situated on Sakharov Square, but it was built in 1901 as a Provincial Treasury, when Armenia was part of the Russian Empire. It is built of black tufa (stone that exists only in Yerevan), in the style of Russian classicism (Azatyan, 2011, p. 26). After Armenia became part of the USSR in 1923 the building housed the national archives of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Armenia.

Throughout the film, the narration interweaves various fragments of the NAA building with the dramatic action. The film narrative cues the viewer to identify the NAA building as an embodiment of recorded history and thus a representation of power through association of the building with the state organization and the colonial past of Armenia. On a metaphysical level, the building impacts the characters' lives negatively. The plot unfolds around two main cases petitioned at the NAA. First, it is the stepfather's request to read the letter written by his adopted son's biological father, which Armen burns. Second, it is Anahit's petition for a search for her real family name. As both cases aren't solved, and the stepfather is left in misery, and Anahit remains without her real family name, the NAA building metamorphoses into a dark force that brings evil. As the narrative constantly develops the NAA building's character and displays it as overbearing when interacting with Armen and the other characters, two other implications arise. First, the history chronicled in the archives is evil and second, the built heritage exerts a certain influence on humans.

In addition, the interaction between the NAA building and Armen (and other characters) authenticates the fictional story as part of the history of Armenia. As the NAA is represented in the film in its historically accurate function, we tend to read the fictional story as true, or a story that can be true. The seamless interweaving of the NAA building with the fictional story suggests that Armen and Anahit's stories are an "incarnation" of the history of Armenia.

In the first exterior sequence, the NAA building appears in a long shot. The narrative shows the general appearance of the building. As the camera zooms in on Armen's car coming to a stop, the closer shots of the building develop the character of Yerevan. The façade details emerge, and we see the second level balcony and linear ornaments on the Yerevan black tufa.

The second scene starts with the camera panning on a passing bus. Then the camera establishes Nalbandyan Street and the NAA building. Armen and his colleagues are mute, small and insignificant. The camera moves upward across the façade and pauses on a poster – a still shot, in which the viewer has an unobstructed view of the face of the NAA building. This shot shows more details of the building – the windows on the upper level with arcs, the rectangular windows on the lower level, and the portal. After Armen exits the scene, the camera again moves upward on the poster and the façade.

In the sequence where Armen resolves the old woman's petitioner issue, the portal of the NAA building and the decor on the façade that appear in the shots broaden the range of the characteristic features of the building by showing the semi-basement level windows and sectional ornamentation of the façade. The building appears in still a longer shot. Armen and the old woman walk down the stairs into a semi-basement bistro. When they return to the outside of the NAA entrance the building is shown again surrounded by busy traffic and passing

pedestrians. The decor on the building 'narrate' the story of Yerevan by describing the characteristics of the city – modernity through medieval forms.

The last exterior shot of the NAA building, too, starts with the camera tilting downward that is in sync with the lowering of the poster across the façade of the NAA building. The NAA building is framed in a close-up shot. When the camera frame becomes still, Armen enters it and walks into the building. The shot provides another angle of view of the NAA building – from bottom up and from a slanted angle on the entrance.

Apartment Blocks and Public Buildings

The narrative also highlights the supremacy of other buildings over human characters, thus reinforcing the thematic conflicts between recorded history versus memory and between individual versus history. In the scene where Armen arrives at work, the mise-en-scène and cinematography articulate a remarkable interaction between the buildings on Nalbandyan Street, situated across from the NAA building, and the stepfather. The camera documents the city's life at dawn – we see the apartment block (1950s), a mixture of national and classic styles (Azatyan, 2011, p. 22) and the adjacent building of the Department of Architecture of Yerevan City Council (1940-50s), built in the spirit of Armenian national romanticism (Azatyan, 2011, p. 22), in the empty Nalbandyan Street. The camera captures the city cleaning service's activity and a passing trolley-bus that interferes with the shot of Armen getting out of his car. Seeing the stepfather, Armen stops walking. From Armen's perspective we see the stepfather's black hollow silhouette against the background of the buildings (the apartment block and the Department of Architecture of Yerevan City Council) diminishing diagonally into the depth of the shot. The buildings line the street up to Republic Square. The still frame and the particular angle provide the aesthetic effect. The images of the buildings made of local tufa and built in the Armenian national romantic style charge the shot with historical significance. A sense of upward movement of the elevated office buildings, with their pillars and palace-like appearance, resonates with an implication that Yerevan possesses a kind of durability that is hard to obliterate, because over millennia the city has maintained its status and in 1972 is continuing its mission of layering history. The choice of the building is significant too. The early morning sunlight shining on the façade of the building imparts a sense of glory, while the palatial architecture gives an impression of grandeur.

The photographic composition implies that against the massiveness of the stone-wrought city the stepfather is helpless. The man, in misery because he has to give up his adopted son, is a fragile black silhouette standing humpbacked in the background of grandly rising spectacular buildings lit by the morning sun. This shot is Armen's point of view. He knows and commiserates with the man, as we find out minutes later. Later in the film, Armen is in the grip of the truth contained in the certifying letter, which proves tragic and painful because, even if the artifact can be destroyed, its truth will remain in memory. Humans' inability to erase their memories plays out along with how buildings carry history. The deep perspective, lined by sublime buildings exulting in their victorious stance over an individual's destiny, takes the viewer from the moment into the depth of history. At this crucial moment of his life, the stepfather has no choice but to face a childless future. Through a particular framing, the Armenian national romantic architecture is given a monumental character. This image, together with the implication that the "chronicles" are impregnable because they are protected by the NAA buildings' firm structures, contextualizes the stepfather's tragedy that is part of the thematic thread – a human being is powerless against the weight of recorded history.

An example of how the interaction between building and character explores the conflict between individual and history is the scene where Armen visits Anahit. The apartment block on the Sayat-Nova and Nalbandyan crossroads where Anahit lives fills most of the frame, along with the Ani Hotel (a well-known landmark of Yerevan) next to it. The apartment block appears in its full bulk. The horizontal lines of the windows and balconies diminish in perspective. The building is more an accumulation of history – culture, politics, and social activity – than a home. The lingering of the camera after Armen stops the car and the composition of Armen's tiny car against the apartment block building together insinuate the controlling force of the building. Anahit's apartment is represented as a non-place, because its interior is not shown. It is not different from any other public building, for instance the NAA. The building belittles the lovers' issues and deeds. There is no comfort and safety for the couple. The past (the built heritage) determines Armen and Anahit's destiny.

The scene at the hospital reflects how fragile and vulnerable Yerevanites are when they clash with the history of the city, represented by its architecture. In the sequence where Armen takes Karen to hospital, we see the building of the Republican Clinical Hospital of Yerevan that stretches from right to left and beyond the frame. The massive building of the hospital, compared to Armen's tiny car, is a lifeless and frigid rock. The hospital seems to be the hope, the place where the life of a man who has been in an accident can be saved. Although Karen struggles to resuscitate the man, he dies.

A scene at the Genocide Memorial is a special moment, where the rock-like monument validates the sinister and mischievous forces lurking behind an individual's destiny. The first two shots describe the memorial before the viewer sees Armen and Anahit. Anahit tells Armen how she has survived WWII. The memory of one and half million Armenians massacred at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries still wounds many Armenians in the same way that Anahit's memories of her parents who perished in WWII still haunt her. The scene is concluded by an extreme long shot, where, in the dark night, with the usual lighting at the memorial, Armen's tiny figure stands against the massive stone blocks, his hands stretched out in the manner of the crucified Christ.

In another scene, the apartment block on Nalbandyan Street "speaks" by describing social issues typical of Soviet Yerevan. While Anahit and her fiancé quarrel, the extreme long shot followed by a long shot from Armen's point of view reveal that the ground level windows are barred and the panes have been replaced by cardboard. While Armen watches Anahit quarreling with her fiancé, the viewer sees the barred windows, which hints at burglary as a possibility and also informs the viewer that the semi-basement levels in the apartment blocks in Yerevan weren't used for residential purposes. Another characteristic image of Yerevan is also captured in this shot – the façade of the apartment block is made of basalt in the lower section and of Ani tufa in the section above the ground-level windows. In other scenes, Yerevan comes across as an ancient mythical city. In the wedding scene, the building fragments with a colonnade are reminiscent of a medieval city quarter. In the Republic Square scene, the National Museum of History, with the monumental arcade and tall pillars typical of ancient architecture, has an awe-inspiring grandeur which imposes discipline, order, and divinity under the bells of the clock tower.

In the finale, the narrative discourse shows Armen's last daydream in a silent long shot – his wedding party posing for a photograph against buildings in the Armenian national romantic style in perspective. Beginning with images of windows, the narrative unfolds in gradually lengthening shots of facades with windows, the number of which increases from shot to shot.

At the end, Yerevan encroaches upon the human characters with a plot-controlling gravity and settledness. Coming in rather aggressively to finish Armen's story, Yerevan shows its might in stone. The buildings are a silent testimony to human history and perhaps a victorious silent declaration that cities are superior structures which outlive the humans who build them.

Windows

Windows are constantly visited throughout the film. They are seen as parts of buildings, however, they gain a certain agency, too. The symbolic nature of windows in the film does not lie in their function as transitional spaces, or as a separation, insecurity, entry and exit and/or intrusion. Rather, the film narrative tends to implicate windows with a more functional role integral to the action. In two scenes, the windows domineer over the characters; in some scenes, windows are in the background by virtue of being part of the buildings and provide spatial narrative coherence; and in the last sequence windows "speak" significantly. In addition, the images of windows authenticate the fictional story as Armenian the same way as the buildings and streets.

In the film, windows establish an unusually marked presence. When Armen and Anahit appear in a window frame, they are small, occupying the window frame like indistinguishable figures, while the window is depicted in its entirety. Because windows are presented as part of buildings, their participation in action is active, though they are lifeless and eerie. The significant shots in this vein are the one where Armen watches how Anahit and her fiancé argue (discussed in the section on buildings), another one where Anahit looks through the apartment block window down at Armen (when they part ways after a date), still another one that is right before the climax, which shows Anahit's view of Armen again through the same apartment block window.

In the parting scene, Anahit enters the building, walks upstairs and through the second floor window looks down at Armen. The window frame is the boundary, from behind which she can see Armen, but not be intimate with him. When Armen watches Anahit and her fiancé quarreling, he is framed by the window in the NAA building. The window frame's massive rocks make Armen's figure look fragile. The black color is ominous, as if the window holds Armen back from desiring Anahit. The camera views Armen in the window from the ground, and the angle expresses a certain privilege to Armen's position as a clerk at the NAA. But this privilege is sinister, because knowing about people's lives Armen understands how unsafe and powerless humans are. Armen and Anahit's being contained by window frame suggests that transition for them is impossible. The window frames trap Armen and Anahit, forbidding Armen from escaping his job and preventing Armen and Anahit from merging into a happy matrimonial union. The broader implication is that buildings contain humans, and closely linked with it is the idea that the human characters can't escape from the grasp of the city, namely, the recorded history.

In some scenes, the viewer can see endless rows of windows, like eyes watching the action. These images appear continually and build up the setting of the story, making the viewer anticipate similar settings in succeeding scenes. The windows' narrative function reinforces the argument that architectural features function as a mechanism of narrative continuity. As a metaphor for eyes, the windows imply that Yerevan is engaged in the film as the omniscient narrator, or that Yerevan is in control of the action.

At the resolution of the film, we see a montage of shots of windows, following a particular pattern. The succession of window images starts with a close-up shot of a window, then moves

to increasingly lengthening shots to show rows of windows. The viewer can see a window partially, then a full shot of it, then a row of four windows on a façade, then a part of a façade with two full and one half rows of windows, then a window grid of three rows and six columns, and finally a complex structure of fifteen narrow and small windows in the upper section and sixteen big windows in the lower section of an elevation of a building. In the last shot, the lower section windows form pairs inside eight niches marked by arcs and protruding pillars. The final shot displays the whole façade of Tumanyan Museum where the windows are difficult to see because three arcs obstruct the view. As artifacts combining ancient, medieval and modern styles and as an allusion to escape, these window-characters with their serene and unshakable majesty reinforce the undercurrent motif of the incapability of humans to obliterate the past. In connection with denial of escape, the images of windows convey that buildings contain history, physically and metaphysically, which can reveal inconvenient truths for humans. In a broader sense, Yerevan controls Yerevanites because it "knows" much more about them, their biographies, identities, and forefathers than Yerevanites themselves.

Conclusion

The article offers an insight into the technical and symbolic aspects of filmmaking by claiming that two kinds of cinematic narrative – fictional and documentary – underlie the feature film *The Chronicle of Yerevan Days*. Working from this premise, the article argues that Yerevan exerts a special agency in relation to the other characters. The agency of the city in the film is articulated in the representation of city spaces, buildings and windows. The city's spaces – streets and squares – direct the character's movement through "real" Yerevan, guide the viewer through the narrative as a "realist witness" (Alter, 2005, p. 10), as well as build up Yerevan's character. The buildings interact with the characters on a metaphoric level by acting as an antagonist and oppressing the characters by their supremacy. As part of the buildings, the windows restrain the characters' desires and provide a spatial narrative continuity in the film. Subsequently, the location filming enables the film to authenticate the fictional story as Armenian by exploring how the geography and built heritage of Yerevan construct meaning within the film. A sense of authenticity emerges from the visual and auditory representation of "real" Yerevan. Extending the argument, the article further suggests that the exterior cinematography in the film contributes to the major theme, which is the depiction of the past as an opposition between recorded history and memory.

To theorize the argument that the representation of an actual city as an agent authenticates the fictional story, it can be proposed that the references to the architecture of Yerevan in the film are related to the role of place in meaning-making. The idea that spatial representation is used in *The Chronicle of Yerevan Days* as a meaning-making device underlies the connection between the audience as "realist witness" (Alter, 2005, p. 10) and the function of cinematography and sound that is observed in the article. Use of place as a meaning-making device is a subject of critical debate within the academic studies of cinematic city and representation of architecture in film. In some studies in this field, the underpinning argument is concerned with the idea that the deployment of city spaces as mise-en-scène articulates motifs and theme, and creates authenticity. In other studies, discussions revolve around the idea that the representation of routine life in the city is used to define modernity and characterize modern city life. Perhaps the pinnacle of the cinematic practice of using spatial narration is Antonioni, who uses built heritage as a device to communicate ideas and themes. By connecting these interpretations with Kappelhoff's idea that cinematic representations of space are read as realistic settings, it can be concluded that in the film *The Chronicle of Yerevan Days* the city is employed as a device to contextualize a fictional story in terms of ethnicity,

national culture, and urban geography. To further this conclusion, da Costa's claim that the urban environment can function as a narrative and express meaning in film supports the theory that place can be employed in film as a meaning-making device. In this capacity it can be considered as a narrative constituent that is equipped with agency.

In the film *The Chronicle of Yerevan Days*, Dovlatyan interweaves the images of the actual routine of Yerevan in 1972 with the fictional story in a dialectical opposition between human agency and historical determinism. A hypothetical explication of this dialectic may be that humans create art, which afterwards determines their activity. The idea that built heritage (city) acts as an agent calls into question the idea of agency. It may be connected with the duality of human perception in terms of the opposition between pragmatic and aesthetic, manifested in the narrative style of *The Chronicle of Yerevan Days* that is both documentary and fiction. Recording history is the practical side of our life. Yerevan and its built heritage provide valuable information about the past of Armenia. However, our imagination calls for reflecting on material culture and its influence on us and questioning bare facts, because we seek subtlety in understanding life and our relationships with each other. Hence Armen's demise, which suggests human's inability to make sense and probably come to terms with history because of its all-encompassing feature.

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Metaconsumption, Convergence and Stylization in the "Real" Teens of *Laguna Beach*

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Abstract:

Despite its name, the shows making up the reality TV genre are well-known for being "real" in only the loosest sense. *Laguna Beach: The Real Orange County* (2004-2006) followed teens through the end of their high school careers, as they attend prom, graduated and prepared to embark on college. The MTV series was constructed as a "real" foil to the popular scripted drama, *The O.C.* Unlike shows that set out a premise – from *The Real World*'s "seven strangers picked to live in a house" to the competition-focused *Survivor, Big Brother* and *The Bachelor* – *Laguna Beach* portrayed itself as real and, in doing do, blurred the lines of real and fiction.

This article interrogates the role of stylized consumption within the "real" world of *Laguna Beach* to argue the show blurred reality through consumption of relatable cultural products, including *The O.C*. This article argues that consumption within the show was key to making the teens relatable and realistic. From there, the television practices take on a new dimension by allowing routine teen events to be stylized and dramatized yet still read, ultimately, as real.

Keywords: consumption, convergence, *Laguna Beach*, reality television, social construction

Academic inquiry into reality shows has been vast (Andrejevic, 2004; Carpentier & Van Bauwel, 2010; Hetsroni, 2010; Hill, 2005; Kavka, 2012; Kraszewski, 2017; Murray & Ouellette, 2009; Ouellette, 2016; Sender 2012; Slade, Narro & Buchanan, 2014), but inquiry into the shows' "realness" has been less theorized. Largely, researchers and critics have acknowledged that, in spite of the name, the genre is not exactly real (Andrejevic, 2004, p. 16). As such, researchers have turned to understand how these shows mediate personal identities (Turner, 2010, pp. 33-70), including aspects like race, urbanism and wealth (Dominguez, 2015; Kraszewski, 2009; Skeggs, 2009), gender (Gray, 2009), production and consumption (Cox & Proffitt, 2012; Cox, 2014; Hearn, 2017), religion (Alsultany, 2016), as well as spaces and place (Lukinbeal & Fletchall, 2013; Kraszewski, 2017). Despite the acknowledgement of the format's mediation, the idea of authenticity of the show remains potent for viewers (Rose & Wood, 2005) and which may have to do with a desire for "authenticity" within consumption (Pine & Gilmore, 2007). However, it is the successful merging of the "real" (i.e. authentic) and "not real" that makes reality TV a powerful cultural form (Carpentier & Van Bauwel, 2010; Rose & Wood, 2005).

This article focuses on the first season of *Laguna Beach: The Real Orange County* (DiSanto, 2004) to interrogate how the show used consumption to effectively blur reality and help to offer a stylized version of teen life. In doing so, the show turns the cultural products and brands consumed within the show into a form of intertexts – an element that can also be consumed by the audience. This can be seen as a form of convergence culture (Jenkins, 2006) that helps to blur the lines of fact and fiction. *Laguna Beach* is an important point for interrogation because it can be seen as a precursor to several more influential and interrogated series, including the *Real Housewives* franchise (2006-Present), *Jersey Shore* (2009-2012), *My Super Sweet 16* (2005-2008; 2017-Present), *16 and Pregnant* (2009-2014), the *Teen Mom* franchise (2009-present), in addition to having two spin-offs of its own in *The Hills* (2006-2010) and *The City* (2008-2010). Further, the blurring of reality in these series can be connected to larger themes within popular culture at the time that helped promote similar lifestyle elements for consumption.

Reality TV and *Laguna Beach* as docusoap

Genre debates around reality television have existed for some time (Hill, 2005, pp. 41–56), largely due to the fact that there are few characteristics that all reality shows contain (Kavka, 2012, p. 8). At its most broad, reality television "refers to unscripted shows with non-professional actors being observed by cameras in pre-configured environments" (Kavka, 2012, p. 5). This definition purposefully skirts more complex definitions that focus on the critical and cultural practices embedded within the programs (Kavka, 2012, p. 5). In a similar vein, Kraszewski defines "reality television as programs that show real people (not trained and/or unionized) in real locations (not a television studio) functioning in situations that resemble their real lives or in situations that were constructed by television producers" (2017, p. 15). These definitions work toward various ends: Kavka discusses reality television practices as part of a genealogy, while Kraszewski specifically focuses on the dynamics and portrayals of space.

Meanwhile, *Laguna Beach* largely fits into Corner's idea of a "documentary as diversion," specifically in the idea of a docusoap (2002, pp. 260-61). Bruzzi adds that while documentaries historically strived "to represent reality as faithfully as possible" the genre was predicated on the fact that "the production process must be disguised" (2000). Dovey has suggested that the docusoap largely changed how documentaries are presented as a reality TV genre. Instead of attempting to present the reality of "ordinary" people, docusoaps placed "popular

entertainment, first and foremost," meaning that the characters and their stores are not "socially meaningful" and largely became famous for playing themselves (2000: p. 136). Researchers have explored several aspects of docusoaps including the creation of celebrity (Dhoest, 2004), portrayal of masculinity (Mazzarella, 2008) and race (Dominiguez, 2015).

In many ways, *Laguna Beach* fits as an archetypical teen docusoap, a stylized and edited version of events of ordinary people. The show follows Lauren Conrad and a cast of her friends through the final months of their high school careers. The storylines are hardly groundbreaking – the show largely revolves around the romantic rivalry between Lauren and Kristin for Stephen's affection – nor can we truly say the characters or topics are socially meaningful. Perhaps the most important aspect of *Laguna Beach* is the show's explicit emphasis on "reality" (Bindig and Bergstrom, 2013, pp. 174–81). Both the title – *Laguna Beach: The Real Orange County* – and the show's opening title screen work to reinforce that the show is intended to be a truthful depiction of the teens' lives. A simple black screen with white lettering before the start of *Laguna Beach* reads, "The following program was shot over a six month period in the city of Laguna Beach, California. The people, the location and the drama … are real."

Kavka's (2012) genealogy study of the genre pinpoints several pivotal reality shows that helped define the genre, and these include *An American Family* (1973), *The Real World* (1992-Present), *Big Brother* (1999-Present) and *Survivor* (2000-present). In comparison, *Laguna Beach* has largely stayed under the academic radar; one exception is the ideological critique offered by Bindig and Bergstrom (2013) in relation to *The O.C.* However, *Laguna Beach* can be seen as a reinvigoration of the MTV reality show, and unique in that it followed a specific group of people within a specific place. Other popular reality shows at the time were of the *Survivor-Big Brother-Idol* variety, whereas *Laguna Beach* turned the lens completely toward "real" teens, as they went to the prom, applied for college and ultimately moved on from their hometown. The show was unique in that it didn't have "such self-aware reality TV conventions as cast interviews and confessional-booth revelations" (Susman, 2004). In short, there was an earnestness in the setup and storytelling that helped make the show more realistic. MTV would follow this more realistic approach through other shows like *16 and Pregnant* and *Teen Mom* (Guglielmo, 2013) and this vein of storytelling would later be used toward camp ends in *The Real Housewives'* franchises (Dominguez, 2015).

"Real" as Metanarrative and Metaconsumption

While all shows have an overarching premise – *The Bachelor* follows contestants on a search for love and *Survivor* wants to see who can "outwit, outplay and outlast" – a set of shows Hearn (2009) points during the early to mid-2000s had self-contained metanarratives. Shows like *The Joe Schmo Show,* (2003-2004, 2012) a fake reality show for the purposes of fooling one "contestant" into thinking they were one of a reality show and *My Big Fat Obnoxious Fiancé* (2004), a show set up to trick an entire family about upcoming nuptial can be seen as part of promotional culture and a response to consumers getting wise to production qualities within the genre (Hearn, 2009, pp. 166–71). In comparison, *Laguna Beach*'s metanarrative suggests the show is the "real" side of Orange County and juxtaposes itself to the constructed version shown in the popular drama, *The O.C.* (2003-2007). This reference to *The O.C.* helps to link the shows and, in doing so, places consumption of cultural products at the center of the *Laguna Beach*'s reality. Teens within the show reference *The O.C.* in conversation and can be seen watching the show. This intertextualty between *Laguna Beach* and *The O.C.* suggests that the teens of *Laguna Beach* consume the same products as the show's audience.

Reality – as have been noted for decades – is largely a product of social construction. Following the vein of Berger and Luckmann's seminal work, *The Social Construction of Reality* (1966), we can see everyday life as reality, even if we can intellectualize and question what is real (p. 23). Largely, this understanding of everyday life as reality comes down to discourses – whether written or visual (Gamson, Croteau, Hoynes and Sasson, 1992) – since we can largely only communicate and express ourselves by predetermined means. Institutions, including the media, are key in helping to construct an objective understanding of reality through the discourses presented and, therefore, help construct the way we label, express and communicate our experiences. Discourses can be changed and altered, but often once they are set in place, their meaning becomes sedimented (Berger & Luckman, 1966, pp. 67–72) and their constructedness forgotten (Del Gandio, 2008, pp. 22-23). Potter reminds us that language and all discourse practices are caught between reflecting and constructing reality since descriptions, including linguistic discourses and various modes of presentation, have previously been constructed (1996, pp. 97–99). Further, every representational act we take embeds an "objective" reality, even when discussing subjective experiences.

The mass media is just one institution that can help construct an objective reality. Again, while there is always a mediation of such presentations, Van Bauwel and Carpentier suggest that reality television helps to blur reality by relocating what and how we understand reality (2010, pp. 3–6). Meanwhile, Andacht (2010) takes a Peircean semiotic approach to argue that reality television programs simultaneously offer up the "real" with the artificial. In this sense, reality TV viewers are not suspending disbelief while watching, but rather all involved are playing with the border between fact and fiction (Andacht, 2010, p. 59). In the case of *Laguna Beach,* viewers are asked to accept that the show is real, even if edited for the camera.

Largely, *Laguna Beach* used consumption of better known cultural products as a means to support its realness and helped people see themselves reflected within the show's characters. As such, the show led its audience to engage in metaconsumption, since they were watching others consume. This metaconsumption can be seen as a version of convergence culture where the audience is asked to "make connections among dispersed media content" (Jenkins, 2006, p. 3). This can take the place of commercially produced materials, but these connections can also be made by audience members – independent of commercial structures.

Andrejevic notes that reality shows like *The Real World* and *Big Brother* are predicated that viewers will see themselves reflected in the people on the show (2004, p. 122). However, unlike shows that offer diverse casts, *Laguna Beach* featured juniors and seniors in high school, with average to above-average means living in a virtual paradise. At best, the demographic similarities between the audience and the case would be slim, which means there would need to be another means of associating the characters with its target audience. Rose and Wood have proposed that reality television watchers are constantly negotiating a complex set of paradoxes when making sense of shows (2005, pp. 288-91). Some viewers enjoyed seeing exotic – but not *too* exotic destinations – while others saw these shows as aspirational, representative of how they wished they could be. "Audiences find the settings and situation of reality television programming novel enough to be stimulating yet familiar enough to permit and imaginary participation in them by the viewer" (Rose & Wood, 2005, p. 291). The question, then, becomes what the audience can relate to and/or how they see themselves in relation to the characters in the show.

It is here that we can see the convergence of consumption; the same cultural products that are being consumed within the show are also available to the audience. As others have pointed out,

consumerism is largely the dominant logic of contemporary culture (Bauman, 2007; Gabriel, 2013; Zukin, 2005). The things we purchase and consume help create our identities (Belk, 1988), and we see relationships with and through the things we consume (Arnould & Thompson, 2005; Fournier, 1998; Muñiz & O'Guinn, 2000). Finally, we've long known that cultural systems (McCracken, 1988; 2005; Holt, 2004) – including television (O'Guinn & Shrum, 1997) – have given meaning to our consumption and that successful reality shows like *The Real Housewives* promote consumption (Cox & Proffitt, 2012; Cox, 2014). In this way, we're not necessarily looking for authenticity within the things we consume, but using consumption as a means to judge authenticity and, by in large, reality. In the case of *Laguna Beach*, consumption largely fell into one of two categories. The first is consumption of *The O.C.*, which was an overarching touchstone of the series and continually validated the show's "real"-ness in comparison to the scripted television drama. The second method is consumption of brands and products that would be available to the viewing audience, thereby allowing viewers to see themselves in relation to the cast.

Consuming *The O.C.*

The O.C. was a drama airing on FOX from 2003 through 2007. As Bindig and Bergstrom write in their critical analysis of the show, *The O.C.* can be seen within teen soap opera vein of *Beverly Hills, 90210*, *Melrose Place* and *Dawson's Creek.* Despite (or possibly because of) stereotypical presentations of race, gender and sexuality, the show was a ratings hit and, ultimately, influenced both ideological and aesthetic practices across the television landscape (Bindig & Bergtrom, 2013, p. 189-196). Further, *The O.C.*'s depiction of consumerism showed "brands and products as the extension of one's identity" and presented "products as vehicles for love" (Bindig & Bergstrom, 2013, p. 192). This depiction of consumerism plays into *Laguna Beach* as well, starting from the teens' ritualistic consumption of *The O.C.* As vividly shown in season one, episode six, "The Best Part of Breaking Up …," Lauren asks her friend Lo, "Are you coming over to watch *The O.C.* tonight?" to which Lo responds, "Duh."

Later, Lauren and Lo gather with Morgan and Jen to watch an episode of *The O.C.* The caption introducing the segment reads, "Lauren's House '*The OC'* Night", which helps create the foil between television shows. While the four girls are clearly here to watch the show, viewers of *Laguna Beach* don't actually hear or see much of the show. However, the show is omnipresent to the teens as the following exchange indicates:

> [Indeterminable Voice]: Everyone watches *The O.C.*
> Morgan: Do you think so, or do you think it's just interesting to us because we like, live it in?
> Jen: It must be just us.
> Lauren: No, whenever you go out of town — whenever you meet other people like when we were in Mammoth we met some guy whose … I don't know … we were talking about home and he's like 'You guys live in the *O.C.?"*
> Morgan: Yeah, totally.
> Lo: And like when Dieter went to Ohio to go look at that school …
> Lauren: Oh, they were stoked on him.
> Lo: They were *so* amped on him.
> Jen: Cool, it's like, the new pickup line.
> Lo: It's like, *I'm from the O.C.* [All laughing.] It's goin' down, it's goin' *down* in the O.C.

From this exchange it is implied that *The O.C.* helped place Orange County – and, therefore, Laguna Beach – on the map as an impressive destination to be from. Researchers have noted the mediating power on television shows on destinations (Kraszewski, 2017), including Orange County itself (Lukinbeal & Fletchall, 2013), but the importance of the exchange is giving a form of cultural capital to the *Laguna Beach* teens. Indeed, the fact that the teens realize the cultural capital and seem excited to be able to use it further highlights the symbolic consumption of *The O.C.*

The symbolic power and referential nature of *The O.C.* are spelled out in "A Black & White Affair." During this first episode of the show, Lauren is showing her "best friend" and love interest Stephen the house her parents are building. The house sits on a hillside and offers an impressive view of the ocean. Stephen is taken by the house. "This thing is so nice," he tells Lauren. "It reminds me of the houses in *The. O.C.*"

In this instance, *The O.C.* stands for a particular lifestyle that is opulent and impressive. The point is driven home as Lauren takes Stephen through the construction site, indicating where her bed will be placed in her new bedroom, in addition to the location of her anticipated two closets. Consumer culture and materialism is not new to the teen genre and *The O.C.* was no outlier in this regard (Bindig & Bergstrom, 2013, pp. 87–93), however, Stephen's use of "*The O.C.*" as a means of expression and description, implies that both he and Lauren (and, ultimately *Laguna Beach* viewers) have a common perspective on the show. In this way, *The O.C.* has taken on myth-like qualities (Barthes, 1972, pp. 109–59) as the linguistic use of the term implies an understanding between the two characters, as well as, meaningful to the viewers of *Laguna Beach*.

Another exchange between the teens at the watch party helped tie the characters in *Laguna Beach* to the fictional teens of *The O.C.* This happens first as a statement of goods, but later as a narrative structure employed by *Laguna Beach*.

> Morgan: They break up in every episode and re-get back together.
> Jen: They *are* going out.
> Lauren: Oh, in this show! [Pause]
> [Indeterminable Voice]: That's not what you're talking about.
> Lauren: I meant real life.
> [Pause, while watching.]
> Lo: Oh, I like her Marc Jacobs necklace.
> Jen: I like her hair; it's how you wear it.
> Morgan: I have her jeans.
> [Something shocking happens on the screen and all react with surprise.]
> Morgan: Oh my gosh!
> Jen: *Da-yum.*
> Lauren: [gasps] Ew, ew, ew! Ew — stop kissing!

This scene brings the "real" teens of *Laguna Beach* together with their counterparts of *The O.C.* As researchers have noted, teen shows and popular culture can help create identities through fashion and consumption (Nayak & Kehily, 2008, pp. 126-56; Warner, 2014, pp.75–79), and Lo and the others are no exception. They relate to the characters' consumption choices (i.e. "I like her Marc Jacobs necklace."), while also own some of the same mass-produced goods ("I have her jeans."). They also wear similar hairstyles as *The O.C.* characters on the

show. Taken together, this exchange can be seen as indicating that the *teens* consume *The O.C.* like the audience of *Laguna* Beach, while also being similar to the fictional characters.

The final point of note in these exchanges comes in the form of the on-again-off-again relationship in *The O.C.,* which is compared to the on-again-off-again relationship between Stephen (whom Lauren is interested in) and Kristin. Morgan's summary of the relationship ("They break up in every episode and re-get back together,") sets up the scene, but can have a double meaning regarding Stephen and Kristin. This is made clear when Lauren is expressing her disgust at *The O.C.* characters and is shown on a split screen where Stephen and Kristin are reconciling over a round of mini-golf. It ends when Stephen tells Kristin, "I'm glad we got back together."

Again, the explicit references and watching of the show work in two ways. First, the teens on *Laguna Beach* can be understood as "real" teens who also watch the popular television shows. However, these teens are also the real-life foils to *The O.C.* characters, as they own the same clothing, wear the same hairstyles and live in houses that could be featured in the scripted show. In this way, the audience is forced to question what is real or authentic, and make sense of an ever-increasing referential chain.

Consuming Everything

Elsewhere, there were several examples of the *Laguna Beach* teens consuming various brands and branded activities. As such, if we see brands as a form of media creation (Kornberger, 2010, pp. 45–47; Lury, 2004, pp. 6-8; Moor, 2007, pp. 5–8), it is possible to see brands as part of the reality television's potential authenticity (Rose & Wood, 2005, pp. 287–94). The line between authenticity and branding has continued to blur, as things we generally deem as "authentic" have increasingly been branded (Banet-Weiser, 2012, pp. 1–14). Likewise, marketers have pushed authentic experiences as a way to connect to consumers (Pine & Gilmore, 2007, pp. 1–8). In this way, the experiences of the *Laguna Beach* interacting with and consuming brands can reflect viewers' experiences to make the show appear more real.

Such is the case with Lauren and Lo's shopping trip to M.A.C. in episode 2, "The Bonfire." Lauren's voiceover at the beginning of the episode explains, "I'm hanging out with my best friend Lo and doing what girls do when things aren't going their way – shop." And the cosmetics company gets a shout-out in the episode after the girls walk into the mall.

> Lo: I love this place … Which way is M.A.C.?
> [Exchanging pleasantries]
> M.A.C. Employee: So, what brings you into M.A.C.?
> Lo: Makeup.
> M.A.C. Employee: Makeup, of course, what a silly question.
> Lo: I mean, should just get our makeup done like, for tonight?
> M.A.C. Employee: Yeah, I'll — we'll just play around and we could do …
> Lo; [Interrupting] Here's the rule! Not too much …
> M.A.C. Employee: [repeating] Not too much.
> Lo: Not too heavy.
> Lauren: Isn't it the more orangey colors that bring out the blue?
> M.A.C. Employee: Yep. You can do bronzes and coppers …
> Lo: I've never had … let's do something like that! OK.
> M.A.C. Employee: Alright.

Lo: But not too sparkly.
M.A.C. Employee: What is tonight by the way?
LC: One of our friends is having an open mic night at a coffee pub that he set up. So …
M.A.C. Employee: Cool.
Lo: And we're going to sushi and to a friend's house.
M.A.C. Employee: So, are you going out solo tonight or do you have dates?
LC: We're always solo.
M.A.C. Employee: No ball and chain.
Lo: No — no ball and chain whatsoever!

The scene both name drops a familiar brand name to the viewers, while also showing Lauren and Lo consuming the product and experiencing the brand. The message about shopping for makeup at M.A.C. is clear, but so is the interaction with the M.A.C. employee. Presumably, this is an interaction the viewers of the show have likely had at the store, thereby making the scene more relatable. A similar situation is set up while, Lauren, Lo, Morgan and Christina are getting manicures and pedicures before prom and the camera zooms in on bottles of Maybelline's Wet Shine nail polish.

However, makeup isn't the only place where brand names get highlighted. In one episode, Kristin and Jessica decide to make dinner for themselves and for their boyfriends, Stephen and Deiter. As the girls bring home groceries to cook, the scene plays out as follows:

Kristin: Get out of the kitchen. You guys can't see what we're making.
Stephen: Do you have a Lean Cuisine?
Deiter: Organic cake!
Stephen: Oh my God …
Jessica: Hey, shut up.
Deiter: Fay-tah cheese? [Pause] Fay-tah chese?
Kristin: [Laughing] I told you they don't even know, they don't even know what it is. Fay-tah, it's feta.
Deiter: Do you know what this is? It's like, goat.
Kristin: [To Jessica] Told you. [To everyone] You guys, just get out! You don't even know like anything about cooking. Just get out!
Deiter: Hey — I'll have my pasta without feta cheese, please.
Kristin: It doesn't go on the pasta, dumbass!
Deiter: Hey Stephen?
Stephen: Yeah?
Deiter: Do you want to go to Jack in the Box?

While the exchange in joking, Stephen and Dieter drop causal references to Lean Cuisine and Jack in the Box – brand names viewers would be familiar with. This helps to make the situation seem more real since these are jokes viewers (or their boyfriends) might make.

Likewise, brand names get brought up in season one, episode three, "Fast Cars and Fast Women." As the opening narration explains, Kristin is trying to "score" a new car. First, Kristin has a back-and-forth with her brother about how her car, which was previously his car, is "old" and "falling apart" and how she needs to persuade their father to purchase her a new car. A later scene has Kristin announcing that it's a "great day to go car shopping," and she and her

friends visit an Audi dealership. Another brand mention plays out as they leave the dealership empty handed.

> Sam: I hate going car shopping.
> Kristin: So do I! Now I want a new car so … and here's the old Isuzu.

Throughout the episode, Kristin's Isuzu SUV was prominently shown even as it broke down while driving back from the Audi dealership. After expressing that she doesn't know what to do, Kristin asks, "Should I call AAA?" And later shouts out the window to a friend, "My car broke down; I called AAA!" Car brands get pulled into the scene as Kristin and her friends block traffic when the SUV is unable to move. Other drivers are honking their horns as traffic slows behind them.

> Kristin: Oh my God!
> [Friend]: Notice how every person that honks is driving a really nice car?
> Kristin: A BMW, Mercedes, Range Rovers … yeah.

Again, the mention of the brand names – from Audi and Isuzu to AAA – helps to make the scene more relatable and could be something viewers have experienced. The references to and mentions of brands become more important for realistic portrayals as brands infiltrate more areas of our lives (Banet-Weiser, 2012). In the case of makeup and car brands, the fact that the cast of *Laguna Beach* consumes them can work to make the cast more relatable since these brands are known by and possibly even used by the audience. Since there is a very specific demographic of the *Laguna Beach* cast, the brand consumption can be seen as a means to help viewers identify with the cast, which is key for viewers to "participate vicariously" in the show (Andrejevic, 2004, p. 122)

Presenting a Stylized Teen Life

However, keeping in mind that reality shows are always a negotiation of real actions and fiction (Andacht, 2010), we must ask how this possible blurring can be read. This fact is even more important for *Laguna Beach*, since it purported to be "real" and blurred the lines through consumption of media products and other goods. As noted above, *Laguna Beach* stayed away from the confessional style and general "low production value, high emotions, cheap antics" often associated with reality shows (Kavka, 2012, p. 5). Moreover, as Bindig and Bergstrom note, the shows aimed to be more cinematic in an attempt to look more like a film and less like reality television show (2013, pp. 175–176). In practice, this means that the "real" cast of *Laguna Beach* appeared more like they were in *The O.C.* than in relatable, real world settings.

Much of this stylization came in the dramatizing and in other ways amplifying hallmarks of teen culture from after-school jobs to prom. U.S. teen culture usually include the hallmarks that became common among high schoolers brought by the post-World War II economic prosperity. As teens stayed in school longer, they developed traditions, like prom, and a distinctive lifestyle that revolved around schools, friends and dating (Mintz, 1997). Eventually, teens came to be seen as a viable commercial market (Massoni, 2010, pp. 109–40; Palladino, 1996, pp. 104–9), and the demographic has been the target of goods and media ever since (Bindig and Bergstrom, 2013, pp. 11–18; Hine, 1999, pp. 225–48). However, it is the teen rituals – parties, prom, graduation and heading off to college – that *Laguna Beach* featured more prominently and, as such, would be the where the cinematic stylizing would come into contact with blurred the boundary of fiction and reality.

Through the series, there are several examples that highlight unrealistic scenes and scenarios that allow reality to feel stylized or otherwise blurred. A prime example is the opening credits of the show, which played after a brief teaser of each episode. The opening features picturesque shots of Laguna Beach and of each cast member while Hillary Duff's "Come Clean" plays. In short clips, Stephen, Lauren, Kristin, Trey, Christina, Morgan, Christina, Talan and Lo are shown completing a variety of ordinary "teen" activities – from surfing (Stephen) and longboarding (Trey) to dancing (Morgan) and lounging in the pool (Kristin). Each scene shows the cast member in their best light, often while basking in a sunset glow or with some other cinematic editing. The music combined with the imagery of each cast member work to make the presented life of cast member more dramatic and stylish.

Several highly stylized (and likely constructed) scenarios take place throughout the series. In "A Black and White Affair," Lauren and her friends plan a semi-formal gathering of 20 to 30 people at a nearby hotel that the girls rented out for the event. Scenes highlight the hotel management showing the girls the rented suite for $700 a night, and a spattering of girls getting ready at the hotel and dancing on the bed. The space is likely beyond what most teens would be able to afford – and be invited to; however, *Laguna Beach* makes these seem commonplace.

Another highly stylized event takes place between Morgan and Christina, after Morgan receives a response from her application to Brigham Young University. After an excited conversation where Christina tells Morgan that she got into a school, Morgan says that she received a response from Brigham Young, but she agrees to wait for Christina to open it. The girls then sit on the boardwalk overlooking the beach and the setting sun, as Morgan prepares to open the letter.

> Morgan: I am like so nervous because, like, if I don't get in and I worked for this my whole entire high school
> Christina: Aren't you so excited to open it?
> Morgan: No, I'm nervous, ya know?
> Christina: Yeah …
> Morgan: This is my only choice school; it's the only school I applied to. Like, if I don't get in, then I'm still going to go up there. I'm still going to be a part of the scene because I'm *not* staying here that's for sure.
> Christina: Yeah …
> Morgan: I'm getting out of the bubble. Like, I want to be around those people; I want to be around people with the same standards and I want to get out of this like … party scene … and student kids screwing up on their parent's money, and …
> Christina: OK, open it!
> Morgan: OK, ready?
> [They shriek.]
> Christina: Do it!
> Morgan: OK [reading] Dear Morgan, thank you for selecting Brigham Young University for your undergraduate education. Your application has been carefully and thoughtfully reviewed, because of the high number of competitive students applying to BYU, we regret to inform you … that we are unable to offer you admittance …
> Christina: Oh no …
> Morgan: What am I supposed to do now?

In this scene, *Laguna Beach* takes a memorable rite of passage – getting accepted (or rejected) from your dream college – and heightens the drama and scenery around it. The event would be memorable in its own right; however, the series plays up the event for emotion.

There are several other events that both manage to stylize teen lifestyles and may create unrealistic expectations of teenage consumption. In season one, episode four, "What goes on in Cabo…" the cast goes on a Spring Break trip to Cabo San Lucas, where the teens stay in the Mexican resort overlooking the water. Scenes from the trip show the teens swimming, drinking and overall having a good time, while upbeat Mexican music plays. A similar situation is depicted later in the season during the senior trip when most of the cast goes camping to Santa Catalina Island, a resort destination off the coast of Los Angeles. (Lo is unable to go due to the lack of parental supervision.) The cast takes a decked-out yacht to the island and sets up camp on a hill overlooking the ocean. During the trip, the teens kayak along the rocky coast and later hit golf balls off the cliff and into the ocean. Throughout the episode, Lauren pouts because most of campers are paired off while she is shown as the odd person out. Lauren's loneliness is compounded by the sad music that plays over most of the picturesque shots.

Other events also exemplify the stylizing and likely unrealistic expectations brought on with the blurring of reality. In season one, episode two, Trey sets up an open mic night for Active Young America at a coffee shop. While Trey organized the event, it appears to be a substantial undertaking for a set of high schoolers, but the setting is matched by the grandiosity of the speakers. One of the organizers, who is not a regular cast member, is Polster, a friend of Trey's, who compares Active Young American to "Women's Liberation or Civic Rights."

The second event, also organized by Trey, is a fashion show that highlights four designers and a plethora of models, one of which shows interest in Stephen. The runway show is accompanied by a rock music soundtrack while the after party places make to a slow rock song. Lauren leaves the after party frustrated, as a slow, sad song plays as she calls a friend to explain her disappointing night. The camera follows her as she drives into the distance.

Finally, prom is also another highly stylized event in the show, especially when the cast members are asking or being asked to the dance. While some of the cast, namely Lauren, had a planned or subdued invite, several other teens went all out for the ask. For example, Stephen constructs an elaborate hoax to surprise Kristin, while Deiter prints a massive sign and hires a limo to ask Jessica to the prom. Morgan gets asked to prom by Gary. who decorated her bedroom and wrote the invitation on her mirror, and Trey places lit votive candles that spelled out "Prom?" for his date.

Other scenes from prom, graduation and the final episode "Dunzo," where the cast departs for college are equally stylized along more tradition cinematic means. The emotion around graduation is especially heightened as students are shown in their caps and gowns, while listening to student speakers and as Vitamin C's "Graduation (Friends Forever)" plays over the scene. The song helps put a sanguine spin on a bittersweet event; one that most teens go through at some point in their life. It is here where the blurring of reality is most significant. Most teenagers will not start a "movement," host an open mic night nor a fashion show, and the prom asks were all over-the-top. However, due to the way consumption helps to make the *Laguna Beach* teens the "real" counterparts to *The O.C.* characters, viewers can be forgiven for mistaking the real and the fake.

Implications

As with all docusoaps, there is a constant tension between what actually happened and what was passed off as "real" for story purposes. And, *Laguna Beach* is no different. In the years since, cast members have come forward to detail some of the ways the show was created (O'Keefe, 2014; Takeda, 2013; Zamora, Watson, Farber & Stryker, 2016). However, the show remains an important moment of reality television, consumption and convergence culture.

Following Kavka's (2012) idea of reality television genealogy, *Laguna Beach* should be positioned as an important turn. The show helped to create the idea of a teen docusoap, which MTV would later capitalize on in other forms. Spinoff shows like *The Hills* and *The City* are unlikely to have existed without *Laguna Beach*.

Taking a wider view, it's clear that *Laguna Beach* helped push forward the idea of a "real" show in relation to related fictional portrayals. Most prominently, *The Real Housewives* franchise was created with a similar intertextual association to both *Desperate Housewives* (2004-2012) and *The O.C.* (Zap2It.com, 2006). *The Real Housewives* franchise has been enormously successful, moving from its initial show based in Orange County to include New York, Atlanta, New Jersey, Washington, D.C., Beverly Hill, Miami and Dallas. As noted elsewhere, consumption is a key point in *The Real Housewives* series (Cox & Proffitt, 2012) – something that gets portrayed as "exciting, fun [and] empowering" (Cox, 2014, p. 79). Consumption here is a status symbol to be desired by all. *Laguna Beach* clearly marks a departure for the way docusoaps present consumption, which was later expanded on by *The Real Housewives.*

In this vein, *Laguna Beach* helped place metaconsumption as an element of convergence culture. If, as others have suggested (Rose & Wood 2005), audiences are always balancing the perceived authenticity of reality shows, then watching others consume similarly can make the portrayals more realistic. This is an intertextual convergence of lived and mediated consumption since the characters and the audience have the ability to engage with the same cultural products. Once these situations and experiences are understood as real, the rest of the show – the characters, the narratives and even the aesthetics – become more believable.

Conclusion

Perhaps it is here where *Laguna Beach*'s legacy is most notable. Not only did the show manage to bridge the divide and turn the "real" reality show into a metanarrative of itself, but the show helped center consumption as an integral component of life. This was especially relevant for teenagers, who are often the start of trends, but also can be extended to other demographic groups as well. The act of consumption – whether it's of television shows or specific brands – is a condition of modern life and through the intertextuality with lived experiences, "reality shows" seem more real. With the convergence of mediated and experienced consumption, *Laguna Beach* marks a turning point whereby the "real" becomes stylized version of reality, yet one that is ultimately believable and consumable.

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Sexualization of the Journalism Profession: TV Representation of Female Journalists' Intellect, Labor, and Bodies

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Abstract:

The representations of journalists in popular culture contribute to the public perception of journalism, journalistic routines and conventions, the processes of newsgathering, and overall reality of news media. In a historically male-dominated profession in which the routinization of journalistic conventions seems to perpetuate the male perspective of journalism, the increasing presence of women journalists both reinforce and challenge the masculine culture of the newsroom. By employing a feminist perspective, combined with the discussion about journalistic norms and routines, this paper analyses representations of female journalists in two American television shows – *House of Cards* and *The Following*. The critical analysis of the representation of two women journalists' characters contributes to the understanding of the mediated construction of newsroom reality in which women's labor is gendered and sexualized for public consumption.

Three thematic categories emerged in the content analysis – challenging the existing journalistic norms, negotiating femininity and sexuality, and victimization. All three categories are the most common discourses that negotiate two characters' femininity, sexuality, and their bodies intertwined with their intellectual labor in the newsroom. The themes are not exhaustive of or limited to femininity and sexuality, but include discourses of access to information, new technologies, and business model changes in the media industry. The study considers how the representation of women journalists for public consumption portrays the use of their bodies to gather the news and how viewers might downplay the abilities of not only women in journalism but mistrust the process of news production and the journalistic profession overall.

Keywords: women journalists, journalistic routines and norms, femininity, sexuality

> Zoe Barnes: I am gonna be late to meet someone.
> Janine Skorsky: Who? Like a date?
> Zoe Barnes: A friend.
> Janine Skorsky: Oh, the mysterious fuck-buddy who you get all of your stories from? Lighten up. I was just teasing. Not that I would judge. We've all done it. I used to suck, screw, and jerk anything that moved just to get a story.
> (*House of Cards*, Netflix original series, season 1, episode 9).

The representations of journalists in popular culture contribute to the public perception of journalism, journalistic routines and conventions, the processes of newsgathering, and overall news media (Ehrlich & Saltzman, 2015). In a historically male-dominated profession in which the routinization of journalistic conventions seems to perpetuate this perspective, the increased presence of women journalists both reinforces and challenges the masculine culture of the newsroom (Byerly & Ross, 2006; Steiner, 2008). Both in real life newsrooms and as portrayed in television shows and the film industry, women journalists want to be seen as their male counterparts – tough, competitive, and ambitious. At the same time, they reinforce and fight stereotypical gender roles of being compassionate, nurturing, and caring (Ehrlich & Saltzman, 2015; Steiner, 2008). Moreover, in the reality of a capital-driven global society, the female body, physical attractiveness, and sexuality are exploited in the newsroom as a part of what Steiner (2008) calls market-driven exploitation of sex. According to Steiner (2008), the bodies of female journalists, reporters and anchors are used in media business strategies to attract wider audiences, both male and female.

By deconstructing representations of female journalist characters Zoe Barnes in the TV series *House of Cards* (2015), played by the actress Kate Mara, and Carrie Cooke in *The Following* (2015), played by Sprague Grayden, this article argues that television representations of female bodies and sexualities normalizes gender-typing of journalistic routines. Using a feminist lens, this article examines the ways in which the two characters are portrayed, and contributes to the existing research about representations of women's intellect, bodies, and labor in pop culture. This article also adds to the conversation about the gendering and sexualization of women journalists.

To explore cultural discourses of women journalists' bodies, intellect, and labor this article is situated within the literature on the normalized conventions and routines of the journalism profession, and within literature focusing on the representation of journalists on television. This paper provides close readings of the first season of *House of Cards* and the second season of *The Following* to analyse the representations of two female journalist characters and to disclose patterns present in the images of fictional characters (Zoe Barnes and Carrie Cooke). We argue that these patterns are produced in the male dominated television industry (Lauzen, 2015), which reinforces the gendered way that women are perceived in the processes of gathering, producing, and presenting news. The textual analysis of the two shows offers multilayered readings of on-screen female journalists who challenge newsroom routines.

With the aim to offer a rigorous textual analysis of the characters' development in reference to newsroom practices, we first provide the theoretical and conceptual framework of our study. Next, we present an overview of journalistic norms and routines, and how they are affected by and affect women journalists. We also provide a brief overview of conceptualization of female bodies, and gendering and sexualization of feminine subjectivities. Next, we address the collected data and the method of textual analysis, and we discuss the emerged themes. Lastly, we discuss the findings implications addressing the complexity of the characters' portrayals.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

A core assumption of this study is that the televised reality does not exist in a vacuum, but that is rather informed and based on off-screen practices. Therefore, this article incorporates both the news industry practices in fact and fiction and is grounded in the conceptual framework of journalistic routines and norms (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014; Tuchman, 1978) and informed by Ashcraft and Mumby's (2004) model of critical communicology of gender and work. Moreover, to explicate what it means to be a woman in newsroom, we draw on McRobbie's (1994) concept of "real me" and expand on Shimizu's (2007) understanding of female hypersexuality, which we apply in a different context.

Routine practices provide journalists with guidance on how to gather information, produce, and deliver news by applying the accepted norms of the profession (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014; Tuchman, 1978). Routinization is an outcome of the professionalization of journalism and the process in which journalists conform to institutional practices (Tuchman, 1978). Selection of the news, objectivity, fact checking, newsworthiness, proximity and scope, and many other routines and norms as a part of the journalism profession were institutionalized through different journalism programs at universities in the United States.

However, being affected by new news formats and technology, routines have undergone some significant changes over time (Hallin, 1992; Schmitz Weiss & de Macedo Higgins Joyce, 2009). More specifically, some of the rule changes affect and have been affected by the way gender is constructed in a newsroom (van Zoonen, 1998). To address the importance of gender construction in a newsroom, we draw on the model of critical communicology of gender and work (Ashcraft and Mumby, 2004). This model comes from the field of organizational studies and argues for complex and nuanced relations between gender, discourse, power and organizing. Gender is embodied in the communication praxis (Schrag, 1986) and, therefore, affects and is affected by those communication processes that reproduce gendered subjectivities through discourse constructs (Ashcraft & Mumby, 2004). According to Ashcraft and Mumby, feminine gendered subjectivities use body and sexuality in constant negotiation between power and resistance in the workplace.

To further explicate what it means to be a woman, and how a female body is used to negotiate power and resistance, we draw on McRobbie's (1994) conceptualization of "real me" in respect to differences in understanding what a woman is, how a woman behaves, and how a woman redefines and invents her social self. The "real me" entails different and contested definitions of a body. A female body is a site where physical, symbolic, and social conditions are interwoven (Braidotti, 1989). A body is also a contested site women used to negotiate their identities, sexual subjectivities and create opportunities for empowerment (Braidotti, 2003; McRobbie, 1994).

To embrace different understandings of using sex and body as transforming tools, we expand Shimizu's (2007) notions of Asian women's bodies and hypersexuality as both enslaving and empowering tools to all women in the workplace. According to Shimizu, Asian women's recognition of their own social marginalization enables them to self-invent their own bodies and subjectivities. We expand Shimizu's claims beyond race and argue that women journalists as feminine subjectivities, in a similar way to Asian women, accept their bodies in the political act of redefining sex as a commodity of exchange, and thus empower themselves to redefine the boundaries of normativity. Expanding on Shimizu's claims we added the new dimensions of female subjectivity recognizing different identities, experiences and histories.

The model of critical communicology of gender and work, as well as concepts of "real me" and female hypersexuality, open the space of cross-reading of the portrayal of Zoe Barnes and Carrie Cooke with news industry practices and routines, and therefore, provide multilayered and nuanced readings of the ways televised journalist characters negotiate what women are, what women journalists are, and how they redefine the journalism profession.

Along with the conceptual framework we draw upon in this article, it is important to situate our own bodies and experiences in the discussion of television representations of women journalists as a means of self-reflection because the first author has been a daily news political reporter for eight years. In accordance, her first-hand experience and insight into journalism routines contributes to reading and understanding the nuanced layering of Barnes's and Cooke's bodies, intellect, and labor in the newsroom. In addition, the second author is guided by working predominately in male-dominated business environments. These experiences offer alternative readings of the sexualization of women's bodies in a male-dominated profession and workplace.

Journalistic Routines

Through the establishment and influence of journalism schools and departments especially in the United States, there has been an increased professionalization of journalism that has standardized and homogenized rules and established practices in news production (Shoemaker and Reese, 2014). These rules, more often referred to as routines, provide journalists with guidance on how to gather information, which news are more newsworthy, who are considered to be more reliable sources, how to write an article and organize the lead, and how to disseminate the news by applying the accepted norms of the profession. Even though media routines also differ depending on the news organization or the media outlet type, such as print or television, the overarching goal of routinization is to ensure rationalization and efficiency. For instance, the gatekeeping routine guides editors in selecting which news stories are newsworthy to get published or broadcasted on a particular day (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014; Tuchman, 1978). Prominence and importance of an issue, conflict and controversy, the unusual event, timeliness, and proximity are factors that define newsworthiness (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014).

Similarly, when gathering data and producing the news, journalists also rely on fact checking to avoid disinformation and potential libel suits. They are also expected to follow the industry codes of conduct and report objectively. Objectivity is a tool used to legitimate the news media that produce unbiased and value free information (Hallin, 1986; Shoemaker & Reese, 2014). Furthermore, journalists follow particular narrative structures such as the inverted pyramid, which define the form of the news presentation in descending order of importance, and comply with the rules of news classification of hard vs. soft news (Reinemann, Stanyer, Scherr & Legnante, 2012). Hard news refers to news reports about politics, economy, science and technology, while soft news is represented in reports about celebrities, sports and entertainment (Curran, Iyengar, Lund & Salovaara-Moring, 2009). According to Shoemaker and Reese (2014), reporters rely heavily on official sources, such as governmental officials, to provide accountability for their reports, and on expert sources as a way to maintain objective reporting. Journalists also rely on public relations news releases, organized press conferences, photo opportunities, and they frequently check facts and compare ideas among each other – a routine known as media groupthink (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014).

The routine of gatekeeping, as well as the other routines, are not based only on individual decisions but on the structural norms of news organizations and its audience's needs. New technologies, business model changes, and overall changes in the media industry include the erosion of investigative journalism, the 24-hour news cycle, decreased autonomy of journalists followed by the increase of the influence of those who are not considered to be traditional journalists (PR professionals and bloggers), and stakeholder-driven media (Lee-Wright, Phillips & Witschge, 2012) have affected routines, which are constantly adapting in response to those changes (Hallin, 1992). New media communication technology, such as online news, live news streaming, blogs, and social media platforms altered the nature of journalistic labor and some control of the work process, fostering frequent interactions with the audience, blurring lines between the roles of producers and consumers, and enhancing the need for immediacy (Schmitz Weiss & de Macedo Higgins Joyce, 2009). However, adoption of new platforms and business models does not necessarily challenge and change norms and routines since journalists transfer the old norms and routines into the new media environment (Singer, 2005).

Gendered Routines

Gender and its effects on performance within organizations has been studied in the field of organizational communication (Acker, 1990) and, specifically, feminist approaches to studying organizations (Ashcraft and Mumby, 2004). In news organizations, men have historically dominated the field of journalism in the United States. Data from 2015 revealed that women in the United States comprised 37% of the national workforce in print media ("Employment of men and women by job category," 2015), and a record 42.3% of the workforce in local TV news ("RTDNA research 2015"**,** 2015). According to the data, the overall percentages of women working in journalism have remained at 40% or below since 1999.

In the 1920s, women journalists were treated as biologically unfit for newsroom duties, relegating females to administrative duties (Delano, 2003). Even though the number of women in newsrooms has increased worldwide, women journalists still remain a minority among male counterparts and often feel discriminated against in pay, promotions, and assignments, as well as having limited access to some beats and sources (Miloch, Pedersen, Smucker, & Whisenant, 2005; Walsh-Childers, Chance and Herzog, 1996).

Male journalists, editors, and publishers have dominated the newsroom, creating a culture that reflects masculine values of objectivity and interests in politics, crime, and sports that used to be perceived as predominately, if not exclusively, male (Carter, Branston, & Allan, 1998). The historical lack of diversity in the workforce and its influence on establishing masculine values, standards, and norms implies that an inherently male-dominated industry would produce bias towards, and exclusion from, participation of women and potential values of compassion and caring that they promote.

In a male-dominated newsroom culture, women tend to comply with newsroom rules constructed by predominately white men. In order to be treated as equals with men, women journalists have placed journalism first and left behind their femininity to be accepted as one of the boys (Miloch et al., 2005; van Zoonen, 1998). Even though women denied their femininity to be accepted in male-dominated newsrooms and treated as professionals, they were simultaneously othered by the journalism profession and labelled as compassionate, nurturing, and caring (Ehrlich & Saltzman, 2015; Steiner, 2008).

However, more recent studies show that gender in the journalism profession cannot be a neglected trait because women journalists now challenge the practice of journalism as a male-constructed profession, shaped to accommodate male-created realities (Rodgers & Thorson, 2003; van Zoonen, 1998). Women journalists question the idea of objectivity by approaching news coverage with compassion and sensitivity and by recognizing context and the importance of their readers' interest and feedback (van Zoonen, 1998). While still being assigned marginalized positions in the newsrooms to cover beats about fashion, social issues, health, education, cooking, and children's issues, women journalists still constantly must prove themselves in the profession. They tend to use more diverse sources, report more positively, and rely less on stereotypes than their male counterparts (Rodgers & Thorson, 2003). Women editors are also more likely than men editors to avoid assigning stories based on gender distinctions (Craft & Wanta, 2004). Furthermore, Craft and Wanta (2004) argued that in male-dominated newsrooms, men are more likely to be promoted to editor positions and still predominately cover political beats, whereas women are assigned "soft news" – reports on education, health, and entertainment.

Journalistic routines are gendered through women reporters' bodies. There is a breadth of research that politicizes women's bodies as spectacles and commodities (Coward, 1984; Mulvey, 1989). Within the discussion of gender and sexual difference, female journalists' bodies, attractiveness, and sexuality have become conceptualized as part of the journalistic practices of reporting and presenting the news. In broadcast journalism, women presenters have to regulate and discipline their bodies by looking presentable and attractive (e.g. "smile flirtatiously, ask personal questions, hug villains, and show cleavage"), whereas their male counterparts can be older and less concerned about their weight and physical attractiveness (Steiner, 2008, p. 286). Steiner (2008) argues that visual appearance and sexuality have become a constituent in global discourse of capitalism in which women reporters actively participate in the role of selling the news, both to audiences and advertisers. Moreover, van Zoonen (1998) argues that in market-driven journalism, female journalists' identities are constructed around contested conceptualizations of being a good professional journalist and being a "true" woman. Female journalists' sexuality and femininity challenges their professionalism in the newsroom reality historically created by men. Thus, women in journalism not only follow journalistic norms and routines, at the same time they constantly challenge, redefine, and reject gender differences.

Television Representation of Women Journalists

The representations of journalists in popular culture shape the public perception of journalism as a profession (Ehrlich & Saltzman, 2015). The way journalists, and especially women reporters, are portrayed on screen influences what members of society, outside of the profession, think about off-screen journalists, their daily routines, the newsroom culture, and journalism ethics.

In the early twentieth century film industry, journalists were portrayed as hard-drinking, heavy cigarette-smoking social eccentrics as in the *Front Page* movie from 1931 (Gersh, 1991). Contemporary representations of journalists have become more varied. Ehrlich and Saltzman (2015) argue that there are five archetypes of journalists in popular culture representation: an energetic and opportunistic journalist, portrayed as always in the process of getting some breaking news; a tough and sarcastic female reporter proving her worthiness while competing with her male counterparts; an enthusiastic novice who wants to make a name in journalism; a

big city newspaper editor who wants the story first at any cost; and a ruthless media tycoon who uses the power of the press for his or her own selfish ends.

According to Ehrlich and Saltzman (2015), women journalists are often portrayed either as competent and smart professionals, who are at the same time subordinated to male authority or in need of men to save them, or deceitful and untrustworthy journalists who will do anything to get a story. Another, but less frequent media narrative, presents on-screen women journalists as "sob sisters" who write emotional stories or pay attention to issues that are only of women's concerns (Ehrlich & Saltzman, 2015). In the detailed analysis of journalists in popular culture, Ehrlich and Saltzman (2015) found that sometimes women reporters are portrayed as women who manage the tension between professional and private life. However, as the scholars argue, no matter how hard they work to manage the tension, women journalists are frequently portrayed without companionship in their personal lives due to failing to manage both professional and domestic roles at the same time, typically leaving the profession to pursue true love and a traditional family life. The scholars also found that another type of representation of woman journalists includes the stereotype of female reporters who use sex and/or good looks for news gathering and career advancement. These redundant narratives of a journalist's professional and personal life seem to be reserved only for females, warranting a better understanding of how various media artefacts portray routines of female journalists in popular television shows as well.

To conclude, many works of scholarly research address journalistic routines and norms (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014), the way they are adapting and changing over time (Hallin, 1992; Schmitz Weiss & de Macedo Higgins Joyce, 2009), and the way gender is constructed within a newsroom (van Zoonen, 1998). However, it is important to understand how on-screen journalists are portrayed, specifically in regard to gendered representations, how those journalists apply newsroom routines and norms, and the potential media effects on public perception on women journalists. Therefore, this article adds to the growing body of work involving gendered representations and addresses the way the representations of women journalists in two contemporary American television shows both reinforce and challenge the public perceptions of journalists, their roles, and contribution to mediated knowledge production.

Barnes and Cooke as Journalists Who Use Their Bodies to Gather Information

The two women journalists, Zoe Barnes of *House of Cards* and Carrie Cooke of *The Following,* are worthy of examination and critique because even though these two fictional characters are not the main characters of the shows, both are journalists in different media outlet types, which provides the authors varied situations to consider gendered representation. Barnes works for *The Washington Herald* daily and later for the online news site *Slugline,* whereas Cooke is a TV reporter who also published a book. Both are portrayed as professionals who perform various journalistic routines. Though each woman works in a different journalistic capacity, they both are represented as journalists who use their bodies and sexuality in the processes of news-gathering, especially in sourcing news and in hopes of obtaining career advancement.

House of Cards is a political drama television series, and a, American remake of a British TV show. In the United States, the show is produced by the online streaming service Netflix and premiered in 2013 ("House of Cards", 2015). The plot of this online-only drama series focuses on the political intrigue surrounding Democratic Congressman Frank Underwood (played by Kevin Spacey). Zoe Barnes, represented by the actress Kate Mara, is a young newspaper

reporter in Washington, D.C. with a desire to cover important political events, graduating from mundane city beats. Zoe's ambition to advance in her journalism profession led to her orchestrating an opportunity to meet Congressman Underwood. He subsequently became her lover and a source for all of her ground-breaking stories.

The Following, starring Kevin Bacon as FBI agent Ryan Hardy, is a crime drama focused on fictional serial killer Joe Carroll and his followers that premiered on Fox in 2013 ("The Following", 2013). Television journalist and book author Carrie Cooke, played by actress Sprague Grayden, appears in only the second season that aired in 2014. Cooke, like Zoe Barnes, initiated the opportunity to meet Hardy for the purpose of using him to get information. After Hardy saved her life, they became involved in a sexual relationship. This flashpoint, along with Cooke's awareness of Hardy's hidden alcoholism, provided opportunity for further manipulation of Hardy.

This current research analysis encompasses specific episodes of the two programs. The authors viewed 12 episodes of the first season of *House of Cards* and the first episode of the second season in which Barnes's character gets killed. In addition, eight episodes of the second season of *The Following* in which Carrie Cooke appeared were viewed, along with episode five of the third season in which her character is not visible but gets killed by Carroll's followers.

After deconstructing the depiction of Barnes and Cooke, we applied a feminist lens to organize narratives about the women and their journalistic performance into thematic categories. Three thematic categories that emerged from the analysis were: challenging the existing journalistic norms; negotiating femininity and sexuality; and victimization. These three categories emerged as the most common discourses that negotiate the two characters' femininity, sexuality, and the presence of their bodies intertwined with their intellectual labor in the newsroom. However, those categories are not limited to femininity and sexuality, but include access to information, new technologies, and business model changes in the media industry as well.

Challenging the Existing Journalistic Norms

Modern media practices have changed significantly, challenging journalistic norms. Emergence of the Internet, further technology developments, and fierce competition followed by the changing media business models, have influenced re-organization processes within the newsrooms as well as the nature of journalistic work (Hallin, 1992; Schmitz Weiss & de Macedo Higgins Joyce, 2009). Immediacy and interactivity have become the new norms of technologically altered journalism labor. Decrease in revenue has challenged both print and electronic media to adapt and negotiate the normalized rules established in the golden era of journalism when advertising money was pouring into media companies. At the same time, conglomeration and horizontal and vertical integration of media companies concentrated in a handful of media corporations, has affected and challenged traditional business models forcing media companies to cut costs and apply different strategies to increase profits.

Taking into consideration the changing media environment, Zoe Barnes and Carrie Cooke are represented as journalists who negotiate routines and norms in the modern newsroom. As a millennial representative, Barnes is tech savvy and open to different modes of media production and consumption. In her first scene of the first season's episode of *House of Cards*, she is portrayed as a young journalist who does not like the city beat she is assigned to cover for the print newspaper, but she wants to write for the online edition. "Move me online," she says, convincing her editor, Lucas Goodwin, to let her write in a more unconventional manner.

"My first blog. First person, subjective, 500 words" (*House of Cards*, S1, E1). Barnes embraces new media and the rules imposed by new platforms by rejecting traditionally accepted objectivity and value-free reporting. She is willing to explore online practices of interactivity and immediacy. Moreover, she shifts the focus from source reliability and multiple fact-checking to the importance of instant publication of the news. When asked where she dug up the story on the new education bill, she responds, "Wrong question. The right question is how quickly can we get it up on the site?" (*House of Cards*, S1, E1).

While reporting for *The Washington Herald,* dominated by a masculine worldview, Barnes resists and negotiates the norms and practices from the less powerful position of a novice in the newsroom. More experienced journalists positioned as editors or those whose instructions the newbies in the newsroom should follow, often question Barnes's routines and methods in the process of news production. For example, when Barnes wrote a story about the Secretary of State that could ruin his career, Goodwin asks her, referencing pre-established routines: "Did you call for a comment?...What about research?" (*House of Cards*, S1, E2). In the traditional newsroom of *The Washington Herald* her intellectual labor is labelled as unconventional and therefore, suspicious and not reliable enough. Her methods are in juxtaposition with the journalistic norms of re-checking information, relying on familiar sources, consideration of publishing newsworthy information, and doing thorough research before publishing the news. Accordingly, Barnes states in a television interview, talking about *The Washington Herald* editor-in-chief Tom Hammerschmidt and the conventional routines he follows: "He is…uhg…Tom has very high standards…He makes you double and triple check things, and you want to get the news out the moment you have it, but he makes you re-write it until it's perfect" (*House of Cards*, S1, E3).

The novice role situates her in a less powerful position but, at the same time, empowers her to be less constrained by the existing norms that journalists learn through socialization in the newsroom. This novice position also gives her the agency to delineate who counts as a journalist and redefine the ways she produces and shares the news, as well as what the news is. Furthermore, changes in the current journalism profession are displayed by Zoe's negotiation between old and new media (news print and online reporting), establishment of new norms (less gatekeeping and news space constraints), and introduction of alternative news formats and routines (blogs and online publications) that are becoming a part of the evolving routines. *Slugline*, one example of an alternative media outlet used by Zoe, represents marginal areas of journalism. *Slugline*, as an online media outlet, offers alternative ways of reporting in which reporters write whatever they want, wherever they are opposing the traditional expectation of developing an article in the newsroom when possible, mostly producing and distributing news on their smart phones or tablets, and posting reports online without the editor's formal review process. Alternative routines and alternative media became valorised and accepted in the media environment when Barnes, as a *Slugline* reporter, gains access to insider reports from the White House.

Barnes's negotiation of norms and routines in the modern newsroom is evident in her decision to reject the White House correspondent position for *The Washington Herald.* By rejecting what is considered a prestigious position for journalists, Barnes is redefining what is news and newsworthy, questioning the importance of news coming from the White House through official channels. "The White House news is going to die," she said when discussing with Goodwin whether she should accept the White House correspondent position. "Everything is canned. These perfectly prepared statements... It used to be [a prestigious job] when I was in ninth grade. Now it is a graveyard…Who needs that?" (*House of Cards*, S1, E4). She

simultaneously resists the existing structure in the newsroom and breaks out of the established patterns of how a journalist should climb the ladder in a profession.

However, the representation of Barnes as a novice journalist also positions her in the existing institutional structure in which she is well aware of the established rules. She negotiates her position within the structure by going back and forth in redefining the rules. For instance, she is fully aware of, and accepts the established norms and the impact to her credibility as a reporter when she questions Underwood's story about the Secretary of State. Underwood wants to expose the future Secretary of State's involvement in the college newspapers which published articles that were undermining the Unites States' relationships with Israel. Zoe challenges her source by responding, "But did he write it himself?... There is no story…There is no link. I can't get this past Hammerschmidt," (*House of Cards*, S1, E2). Moreover, she acknowledges journalistic routines as a part of the structure later in the show when she tries to fight the political establishment embodied in the character of Congressman Underwood. Once becoming aware that Underwood has used her to plant the stories he would benefit from, Barnes embraces traditional journalistic routines of thorough research, re-checking the acquired information, and reaching out to different sources in order to back up the story. She goes back to the normalized routines in order to redeem herself and her deviation from the norms. In the first episode of the second season, before she gets killed, she admits that she crossed ethical lines professionally, physically, and that she holds herself accountable for crossing the lines.

Barnes is ambitious and open to the use of social media to fight the rigid norm of objectivity, whereas Carrie Cooke wants to establish herself across different media platforms. She established herself as a television broadcasting journalist but crossed the boundaries of media platforms and wrote a book about a serial killer. She proved that she could be equally successful as a book author and a broadcast journalist, and therefore, she has re-defined what type of labor counts as journalistic labor.

Like Barnes, Cooke also negotiates power relations with the FBI representatives as sources in terms of who has power to own the information, and who has the right to disseminate it. She always asks official sources to comment on new developments in an active investigation but does not limit the story only to the official comments. For example, Cooke does rely on FBI information about Joe Carroll (a cult leader) but follows her instinct, does not trust the FBI, and reaches for sources outside of American institutions, such as Dr Stroud, a former Carroll mentor. In the following example, Cooke shows her persistence in looking for information outside of what she obtained from official FBI and police sources:

> Cooke: Dr Stroud, I'm Carrie Cooke. Remember we spoke last year.
> Stroud: Why are you people all showing up today?
> Cooke: That's easy. Ryan Hardy believes Joe Carroll is alive. Care to comment?
> Stroud: Last time I saw Joe Carroll, he was 17. I've made that quite clear.
> Cooke: Really? My sources put you at Winslow University on April 4th, 1997. Did you not see him then? And on June 12th, 1999 once again you visited the university.
> Stroud: All right. Come in. I can explain.
> Cooke: Thank you. (*The Following*, S2, E8)

The aforementioned examples construct disruptive images of journalists – the women who report hard news and embrace modern newsroom practices and are able to communicate news across a variety of platforms. Nevertheless, both Barnes and Cooke speak from the space of

difference where they negotiate and define in their own terms what is mediated knowledge, what is the news, who owns it, and who reports about it. They both embrace different platforms for reporting news, include a variety of official and less official sources, and promote more intimate approaches to news gathering and news production. By reporting hard news, and not reporting what is considered to be gendered topics such as health, fashion, and human-interest stories, both reporters decenter the Western male-centered forms of knowledge and privilege through a different set of re-defined journalism practices. Barnes and Cooke represent disruptive images of journalists because they, as female reporters, embody epistemic disobedience by gathering, producing, and reporting sensationalistic news, a practice which, according to van Zoonen (1998), is at odds with the mainstream conceptualization of femininity. By embodying epistemic disobedience, they negotiate power relations and redefine objectivity in their own terms. Moreover, they both participate and create intellectual work across multiple media platforms by producing what they discern as topics in which the public might show interest.

Barnes' employment of social media and her interactive inclusion of news audiences especially aligns with what Schmitz Weiss and de Macedo Higgins Joyce (2009) describe as digital media practices that benefit democracy. Building on what McRobbie (1985) argued about the production and conceptualization of the "real me," both women journalists construct and embrace their "real me" by challenging, re-negotiating, and sometimes rejecting traditional practices and routines of journalism through a debate about what is knowledge and who is powerful enough to produce it. Both reporters do not act out of despair or resignation but instead they invent in their own terms who they are as women, who they are as female journalists, and what practices they adopt as useful and successful. These daily practices are largely influenced by the reporters' active negotiation of femininity and sexuality.

Negotiating Femininity and Sexuality

The second theme constructed around discourses of femininity and sexuality places women's bodies as a visible difference (from men's bodies) that defines women's labor not only in the newsroom, but also in the working environment of the journalism profession. Being a woman constructs how female journalists both position themselves in the news production process, and how others see them while practicing journalism.

The on-screen female labor and female bodies and intellect, which take part in this labor, are the space for the representations of changes in a traditionally male-dominated media industry. For instance, in a television interview, Barnes discusses the ongoing changes in journalism and the transition of the profession from the stability of the all boys' club to a breakup with the traditional newsroom perception displayed in an inclusion of women who still have to be managed and positioned under the men's rules.

> Reporter: Journalism used to be that way [old boys' club] too not so long ago.
> Barnes: I feel lucky. I had lots of trailblazers come before me. For instance, my colleague Janine Skorsky was the first woman at *The Herald* to become chief political correspondent, and that was only five years ago (*House of Cards*, S1, E3)

In this scene, Barnes is suggesting that upper positions in the newsroom hierarchy are mainly reserved for men, whereas women have to work harder to break the glass ceiling and be accepted in the men's club. The tension between the notions of who is in charge and the rules is visible in her communication with the editor-in-chief, Hammerschmidth. He reprimands her

for the behavior that deviates the norm since her "job is to create the news, not to be the news." Facing her rejection of the norms he treats Barnes like a little girl, who has not "even earned the right to be treated as an adult," (*House of Cards*, S1, E3) and calls her "a little cunt" (*House of Cards*, S1, E4). Hammerschmidth's choice of words focuses on Barnes's femininity and positions her as a child-like, immature woman who needs to be controlled and guided by men. His outburst contributes to the existing understanding of journalism as a profession in which to be a respected journalist, she needs to have not only exclusives, but also many years under her professional belt.

However, the choice of the word "cunt" underlines Barnes's feminine body and her reproductive organ, and therefore, implies her incapability to perform in an appropriate and reasonable manner standardized by her male counterparts.

With the redefinition of journalistic practices, and the way gender norms position journalists within the profession, we can see ongoing negotiations through the representation of women who hold positions of power in the news industry hierarchy. Moreover, the construction of femininity in journalism is built around women who are more open to accept and negotiate new media forms, new methods of business, and new rules. This feminine approach is evident in the characters of women owners of *The Washington Herald* and *Slugline.* Both women support Zoe Barnes and her efforts to negotiate what the news is, who has the right to produce it, and what kind of news is business viable. Margaret Tilden, the owner of *The Washington Herald*, said in her conversation with Hammerschmidt: "Tom, we don't need people who follow the rules. We need people with personality. We want Zoe's face, her energy. We want to get her on TV as much as possible. It helps us through the noise" (*House of Cards*, S1, E4). Tilden encourages changes in daily journalistic routines, keeping in mind that those changes are consequences of stakeholder-driven media and the global power rearrangements.

Finally, this theme is built also around sex as a commodity of information exchange, portrayed as a normalized women's routine in the processes of newsgathering and news production. Revealing apparel, flirting, and offering bodies and sex in exchange for information, are evident in the representation of both Barnes and Cooke. Barnes intentionally shows deep cleavage and flirts with the aim to get information from Congressman Underwood, whereas Cooke uses FBI agent Hardy's weakness toward alcohol and sexually seduces him to get a story about the serial killer that she wrote about in her book.

After getting drunk and seducing Hardy, Cooke reveals her identity as a journalist, negotiating the ethical boundaries of obtaining information: "I was surprised when you didn't recognize me last night. So I went with it. I've been trying to get you on the record for a long time, Ryan" (*The Following*, S2, E8). Cooke is aware that using sex to get information is her decision, and she justifies her decision to use sex as a newsgathering tool because more conventional tools have not proven successful. Cooke positions her decision in juxtaposition with Hardy's decision to drink, talk, and accept sex in exchange for his angle of a story: "You don't want your story told, you need to keep your mouth shut. That includes the alcohol you pour into it" (*The Following*, S2, E8).

Similarly, Barnes consciously chooses revealing apparel when meeting with Underwood. This is particularly visible in comparison to the everyday clothes she wears in the newsroom – a hoodie, green army jacket, jeans with her hair in a messy bun. The fact that Barnes is in charge of her body is evident in the scene when she decides to offer her body as a newsgathering tool in the arrangement with Underwood: "As long as we are clear on what this is, I can play the

whore. Now pay me" (*House of Cards*, S1, E9). By accepting her sexuality as a part of her femininity, Barnes accepts her own body as an inseparable part of her subjectivity and professional performance. She uses her own body under her own terms and feels empowered by pushing the boundaries of the ways her body will participate in her labor.

Women's sexuality as a part of the journalistic routine is silently accepted in the profession, as Skorsky points out in episode nine, by stating that all women use sex at some point in their career. In a conversation with Barnes, Skorsky admits that she, along with many other female journalists "used to suck, screw, and jerk anything that moved just to get a story" (*House of Cards*, S1, E9). With a contradictory nature, Skorsky both accepts and denounces these sexual methods. Skorsky's confession uncovers that sexual relationships and overt uses of sex in the news gathering processes are often practiced, but at the same time, those practices, are condemned as unethical. Skorsky claims that she doesn't "do that slut anymore" (*House of Cards*, S1, E9). Offering advice for career advancement, she said: "Cause once word got out, it was like I hit a wall, and nobody took me seriously" (*House of Cards*, S1, E9).

Additionally, it seems that both on-screen journalists and sources, both male and female, would rather assume that women journalists use sex to acquire information than they give women any credit for intellectual labor in the process of news gathering. For instance, before Barnes admits her sexual relationship with Underwood to Skorsky, both male and female journalists in the newsroom assume that the female novice reporter has acquired breaking news stories, not by doing thorough research, but by using her body and sexuality to get the information. This assumption is rarely made about on-screen male journalists. When Barnes brakes the news that Senator Catherine Durant would likely be the new nominee for the Secretary of State, Skorsky's first questions about Barnes's process of news gathering are: "Where are you getting this, slut?...Your stories…Who are you fucking?...You have to be fucking somebody important" (*House of Cards*, S1, E2).

Sexual involvement is not seen only as a strategy to gather the news but also as a technique that women use for career advancement. With this regard, Lucas Goodwin questions Barnes's ethical norms because she "fucked a Congressman to get ahead" (*House of Cards*, S1, E12). Similarly, in *The Following,* Agent Hardy accuses Cooke of a "pathetic attempt at journalism" referring to the past event where she used her sexuality to retrieve the information from him and climb the professional ladder. Therefore, he refuses to meet her for dinner because he doubts "a dinner is just a dinner," alluding to her unconventional methods to generate news (*The Following*, S2, E9).

By representing sexuality as a part of women's way to perform journalism and produce news, *House of Cards* and *The Following* contribute to the normalization and standardization of commodifying and objectifying women's bodies in journalism. Commodified women bodies are spaces of contestation and materialization of desire, pleasure, and pain. The on-screen female journalists recognize and accept the commodification and, as Shimizu (2007) argues, their acknowledgement of their marginalization and sexuality leads to self-invention. In the self-invention processes women journalists accept their sexuality as an empowering tool. Moreover, female reporters on-screen accept that they embody difference and live difference in the male-dominated newsroom. Embodying and living difference is not a pure confrontation of two opposites of a male and female knowledge and existence, but represents a space of difference in which women, as McRobbie (1985) argues, redefine what it means to be a woman and a woman journalist. Both women embrace their bodies as an integral part of who they are, and reject living the binary of being a good professional journalist and being a good woman.

For them, being a journalist means accepting being a woman who has the agency to push and mold the existing boundaries according to their own needs.

However, worth noticing is the fact that both women who negotiate empowerment through the use of their bodies are white middle-class women. Through this portrayal whiteness plays a role in who is allowed to consciously accept and use their bodies, femininity and sexuality as professional tools. Even through accepting their bodies, femininity and sexuality allows all women to be and feel empowered. The portrayal of the on-screen women journalists enables only the white middle-class female journalists to think, live, and embody the empowerment through difference. However, at the same time, this empowerment through difference and respect for difference opens the door for other feminine subjectivities to bring into the discussion their identities, experiences, bodies and desires.

Victimization

The third theme emerging from the analysis involves discourses of victimization of women journalists and manipulation of their "weak" female bodies and intellects. Despite feeling empowered and being able to deliver the breaking news, both Barnes and Cooke are manipulated to publish or broadcast the news on behalf of men. In both representations, the women reporters need to be fed the news and do not find the news on their own. For instance, Barnes texts Underwood in expectation for new information: "Where are you? What are you doing? What's next on the plate? Feed me" (*House of Cards*, S1, E3). Similarly, Hardy negotiates with Cooke to postpone airing the news and to deliver it after he progresses with the case He promises to "feed her with a bigger story" if she complies with his request (*The Following*, S2, E9). Both women journalists position themselves, and are positioned by their sources, as subordinated and dependent on somebody else to get the news.

The series writers' choice to apply the metaphor of feeding the women with the news positions female journalists as those with primal instincts and therefore lacking objectivity and bias-free reasoning. This metaphor strengthens the portrayal of Barnes and Cooke as easily manipulated, controlled, and presented as malleable because of their hunger for the scoop. They are portrayed as weaker, both physically and intellectually. Consequently, they need to be guided when producing news and need men to dictate to them not only what is newsworthy, but also when the news should be published or aired. For instance, Underwood pushed information through Barnes on several occasions and he even used her phone to tweet about a shoot-out in Washington, DC, as a strategic move to blame his opponent, whereas Cooke was threatened and forced twice to air messages crafted by cult leader Carroll and his followers.

Additionally, both reporters are portrayed as women who negotiate fluid boundaries, and resist playing by the established rules. However, the women are depicted as vulnerable because they cannot keep the boundaries between what they feel for the men with whom they are sexually involved and a level of professionalism needed to credibly generate a story. As van Zoonen (1998) claims, women journalists who become sexually involved with their sources lose prestige as professional journalists. Barnes is deemed as deviant because she needs somebody to provide her with information and lead her through the process of career advancement. On the other side Cooke is deemed as vulnerable and therefore, deviant, because she digs too deep to get the information that her life is at stake several times. Both female journalists are not exceptional enough to be portrayed as heroes in their own right. When done by women, resisting the standardized routines and digging deep for the news in an unconventional manner is considered as weakness and unprofessional behavior.

Not only are they portrayed as weak and disreputable, but both on-screen female reporters are portrayed as victims and needing to be saved by men, both literally and professionally. Barnes and Cooke's characters are constructed as victims of the men who used them to disseminate the news and spin public opinion, but also as the victims of their own choices in the negotiation between private and professional spaces. Therefore, they are portrayed as victims of their weaknesses and deviations. However, their weakness and deviation conflicts with the representation of their inner strength. Both are revealing information for the public good when fighting against evil. This contestation between fearless and empowered women who defy the imposed rules and who redefine how they should approach sources and whether they should involve their personal opinion when reporting news is reserved for women reporter. Likewise, the representation of weak bodies and minds who picked the battles which they a priori cannot win in the male-dominated world of journalism and politics, contributes to the complex and multilayered representations of contemporary women who re-invent their subjectivities through this conflict.

However, the importance of these contesting narratives becomes diminished by the creation of characters who need to be controlled and disciplined and who were created in a television drama to subsequently die. In this regard, both Barnes and Cooke resisted traditional norms and negotiated boundaries of how to perform their jobs and use their bodies, but ultimately they are represented as women whose bodies, intellect, and labor needed to be disciplined. They are portrayed as transgressors who are killed as the move of final control over them. Barnes is pushed under a train by Underwood, who felt that she escaped his influence, whereas Cooke is burned alive in a van, preventing her testimony in court. Even though throughout both television shows both Barnes and Cooke resist the norms and negotiate the methods of how they perform journalism, the analysis implies that their deaths are designed to reinforce their weakness and normalize their subordinate roles in the journalism profession.

Conclusion

The fictional representation of journalists has been an increasingly popular subject for academic scholarship for film and screen studies. This article not only contributed to the existing body on scholarly research of televised portrayal of journalists but it also provided a critical examination of representation of women journalists and professional practices in the male-dominated newsrooms. The nuanced analysis of the representations of female journalists in *House of Cards* and *The Following* implies that the female journalist characters were shown simultaneously as marginalized women who used their bodies, femininity and sexuality to challenge marginalization. Analysis of multiple episodes from both series revealed themes of the women journalist characters challenging the existing journalistic norms, negotiating femininity and sexuality, and victimization. These themes were contextualized in contemporary, market-driven American journalism, and represent and contested narratives of normalcy and resistance to, and even rejection of, masculine norms in the journalism sphere.

The ambiguity and ambition of the characters in reference to newsroom practices suggest that female journalists are both drivers for social change, but also vehicles for deviation from norms established in the male-dominated newsroom culture. As the drivers of change Zoe Barnes and Carrie Cooke embraced new news formats, modes of production, and business models in the stakeholder driven market. They adopted more diversified approaches to the process of newsgathering, and challenged the traditional norm of objectivity through the application of more subjective and intimate techniques. Barnes and Cooke incorporated a trans-platform news delivery, and confused the boundaries of whether they themselves were the news or reporters,

or both. The female reporters negotiated and redefined the limitations of what should be considered as news and the nature of journalistic routines. They also reinvented their subjectivities by accepting their femininity and sexuality as a tool of power in the processes of negotiation.

Analysis of these two television series' discourses revealed the ways in which the female journalists used their own epistemology and bodies to create and practice epistemic disobedience. The female reporters used their vulnerability and compassion to defy male-driven rules and position themselves as the carriers of change and bearers of respect for difference.

However, even though these women journalists' lived experiences of gender difference in newsrooms construct the way they are perceived and perceive themselves, their bodies, labor, and intellect, they were still constructed as weak, malleable, and deviant. This contested narrative provides gender-typing of journalistic routines and might be in place because all the directors of the *House of Cards* episodes we analyzed were male. In addition, for the same episodes, only 13 female writers were credited compared to 55 males ("House of Cards the full cast and crew", 2017). Similarly, male, directors and writers were credited three times more in *The Following* than females ("The Following the full cast and crew," 2017).

Representations of journalists in TV shows do shape the public perception of journalism as a profession and the overall perception of news media. This article contributed to the unpacking of the meanings of the female bodies, intellect, and labor portrayed in the characters of Barnes and Cooke. Our study also contributed to the existing research of work and gender by providing the more complex framework that includes model of communicology cross-read with the concepts of "real me," hypersexuality and news industry practices, routines, and norms. Since diversity in newsrooms is still an ongoing process of including not only women but also men of different races, ethnicities, age, and classes, further research is needed to understand how underrepresented journalists see reinvention of their subjectivities in off- and on-screen newsrooms. Furthermore, further research regarding respect for difference in other historically male-dominated professions including soldiers, scientists and/or technology-oriented jobs would encourage both the epistemic disobedience of women in real life and the redefinition of those professions in terms of feminine experiences and identities.

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