



# Media Literacy *and* Academic Research

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## About the Journal

Media Literacy and Academic Research is a scientific journal focused on the academic reflection of media and information literacy issues, media education, critical thinking, digital media and new trends in related areas of media and communication studies. The journal is devoted to addressing contemporary issues and future developments related to the interdisciplinary academic discussion, the results of empirical research and the mutual interaction of expertise in media and information studies, media education as well as their sociological, psychological, political, linguistic and technological aspects.

Media Literacy and Academic Research is a double-blind peer-reviewed journal published twice a year. The journal is international and interdisciplinary, inviting contributions from across the globe and from various academic disciplines of social sciences. It focuses on theoretical and empirical studies, research results, as well as papers related to the new trends, practices and other academic a research areas. Also encouraged are literature reviews, innovative initiatives, best practices in online teaching, institutional policies, standards and assessment. The Journal welcomes the submission of manuscripts that meet the general criteria of significance and scientific excellence.

The members of the journal's Editorial Board are members of the European Communication Research and Education Association (ECREA), UNESCO-UNAOC UNITWIN Network for Media and Information Literacy, European Association for Viewers Interests (EAVI), The Slovak EU Kids Online Team, Media Literacy Expert Group and International Association for Media Education.

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The coronavirus pandemic, which has captured almost the entire world in recent months, can be best described by the term Black Swan. This is a phenomenon by which Nassim Taleb refers to events that seem totally unlikely, but when they do occur, their effect on individuals and society is incredibly strong and often devastating. Unfortunately, we are rarely afraid of phenomena with an extremely low probability - not just the general public, but also experts and stakeholders who have been caught by the pandemic in a completely unprepared state. The Black Swan of 2020 is a nightmare for the entire planet. Although its outlines are already quite clear, not everyone perceives clearly that this

is one of the most fundamental events in the modern history of mankind. According to Kristalina Georgieva, Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund, the coronavirus pandemic will push the global economy into the deepest recession since the Great Depression.

This merely confirms that it is by no means a crisis affecting the public health sector alone. Experts from around the world predict that Covid-19 will have disastrous consequences for almost all areas of economic and social life. The crippling of the world economy will affect states and individuals across the planet. If there is no systematic, coordinated and thoughtful intervention, the consequences will be truly devastating - high unemployment, social impacts, increased crime and radicalization of society. It is in this period that the importance of media and information literacy is reaffirmed. The ability to navigate a vast array of often contradictory information sources and choose the most relevant is key in the Black Swan world. Again, it is confirmed that if a large part of the audience focuses on tabloid media content, it is the worst possible approach that distracts the public from information that is essential for better orientation in an increasingly complex world. This phenomenon is all the more dangerous because, under the pretext of anti-pandemic measures, many states are introducing fundamental and unprecedented measures to curb the fundamental pillars of the democratic system and civil liberties.

In this context, the concentration on science, academic research, education and, last but not least, the ability to deal with information is increasingly important. These phenomena are indispensable for the elimination of health risks, but also the economic and social consequences of the pandemic.

We also plan to regularly address these topics in Media Literacy and Academic Research. We believe that in this way we can contribute to alleviating the consequences that the Covid-19 pandemic brings to our lives and to society as a whole.

Pleasant reading,

**Norbert Vrabec**  
Editor-In-Chief



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*Amanda Grombly, Andrea Anderson*

# Information And Media Literacy: Integrating Literacies Into Library Instruction

## **ABSTRACT**

Media literacy is a critical skill, a subset of information literacy, that at this point in history is more important than ever. Students entering higher education generally receive information literacy instruction at the lower division level. However, the skills taught at this level are rudimentary and geared toward introducing students to scholarly and peer-reviewed sources. Conversely, students have relied upon more popular resources in K-12 education and may not have the evaluative skills to more responsibly consume, and ethically use, popular, news, and social media content. Current instruction methods silo instruction between scholarly and peer-review sources for academic use separately from media consumption in everyday life. This separation is problematic as students may achieve academic information literacy and still fall prey to misinformation, they find online and in social situations. While the Association of College and Research Libraries Framework addresses the need for a set of information literacy abilities, the National Association for Media Literacy Education takes this further with their core principles. At California State University, Bakersfield, media literacy is integrated into several information literacy opportunities. However, it is in full-term information literacy instruction, where we most fully develop the concepts and techniques specific to media literacy.

## **KEY WORDS**

Information literacy. Media literacy. Higher education. Social media. Misinformation. Information literacy skills. Information literacy standards. Media literacy standards. Library instruction.

# 1. Introduction

Until recently, media literacy, the skill set dedicated to critically evaluating print and visual media, has been siloed in communication studies. Students of the discipline are instructed in this skill set to encourage and develop professional ethics and critical understanding of how people communicate. However, with the growth of social media, decrease in traditional news consumption, and transition from written to visual methods of communication, it has become imperative that all students are well versed in media literacy skills.

In recent years, media literacy has been integrated with information literacy in the higher education curriculum. Despite this addition, there are still limits upon which types of media and information students have learned or been instructed to apply these skills to; while students may develop mastery of media literacy skills in the academy, it is still disheartening to see how many of them fail to apply these same standards to their own information and social media consumption.

The goal is to get students to understand that the sharing and consumption of information is a practice in ethics and trust. There is a need to demonstrate what is at stake, and in the current global climate, the reliability of information producers and facts is literally a matter of life and death. Teaching students the importance of evaluating their day to day media consumption is not something that can be taught in passing. In a typical one-shot for information literacy, librarians and instructors have between 15 and 75 minutes to impart onto students how to search for information, and to evaluate it for peer review and scholarship, and how to access said information. It is often impossible to do all of this will, with active learning, in this amount of time.

In a full-term information literacy course, it is possible to take time out to teach students the differences between information they use in the academy and information they consume for personal and business reasons. Appealing to their sense of right and wrong, their ethics, and their understanding of the law helps frame the implications of misinformation, media bias, and fake news.

## 2. Literature Review

Definitions of information literacy are varied, but most include the concept of information discovery, evaluation, creation, and responsible use. The standards for information literacy in higher education have been guided by the Association of Research & College Libraries since 1957 when a committee developed its „*first real set of ‘Standards for College Libraries’ to enjoy the consensual support of the profession.*“<sup>1</sup> Since then, IL standards have undergone multiple revisions as developments in technology, new information formats, and new avenues of information creation have been formed. Most notably, in 2000, an ACRL committee finalized work on the „*Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education,*“ which set out skill-based performance indicators and specific learning outcomes. The standards were widely used, translated, and globally distributed. In 2012, at the recommendation of a review task force, the ACRL Board approved an extensive revision of the standards, which resulted in the 2015 adoption of the „*Framework for Information Literacy in Higher Education.*“<sup>2</sup> The Framework, consisting of six different frames or concepts, pushed IL forward from a specific set of learning outcomes and moved it forward into a more conceptual understanding of information literacy with

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<sup>1</sup> ACRL History. [online]. [2020-04-05]. Available at: <<http://www.ala.org/acrl/aboutacrl/history/history>>.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

more capacity to enhance student learning and critical thinking skills. The Framework defines information literacy as „the set of integrated abilities encompassing the reflective discovery of information, the understanding of how information is produced and valued, and the use of information in creating new knowledge and participating ethically in communities of learning.“<sup>3</sup>

Herakova, Bonnet, and Congdon explore the important relationship between information and media literacy and state that „engaging and furthering information literacy is key to the civil dialogues assignment – from deciding on and researching an issue, through critique of information and messages, to the ethical participation in learning communities.“<sup>4</sup>

In the course of the last twenty years, media literacy has been redefined to include the rapid changes to the media landscape: from television and print culture to a panorama of sources from the physical to the, mostly, digital including both print and visual formats. Institutions like Alliance for a Media Literate America<sup>5</sup>, Center for Media Literacy<sup>6</sup>, Accrediting Council of Education in Journalism and Mass Communication<sup>7</sup>, National Communication Association<sup>8</sup>, National Association for Media Literacy Education<sup>9</sup>, and Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills<sup>10</sup> have attempted to generate a concise definition with an accompanying set of competencies and learning outcomes. Scholars Renee Hobbs and W. James Potter have published extensively on the cultivation and application of media literacy pedagogy. In 2010, both scholars published on „*The State of Media Literacy*“ where they debate the definitions, issues, and themes related to media literacy.<sup>11</sup>

The nexus of media literacy is critical thinking, but there is much debate on the focus of this particular „literacy.“<sup>12</sup> Many argue that media literacy should extend beyond the functional aspects of searching for and identifying forms of media that are more closely associated

<sup>3</sup> *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education*. [online]. [2020-04-05]. Available at: <<http://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/ilframework>>.

<sup>4</sup> HERAKOVA, L. et al.: Centering Information Literacy (as) Skills and Civic Engagement in the Basic Communication Course: An Integrated Course Library Collaboration. In *Basic Communication Course Annual*, 2017, Vol. 29, No. 1, p. 114.

<sup>5</sup> See: ROGOW, F.: Shifting from Media to Literacy. In *American Behavioral Scientist*, 2004, Vol. 48, No. 1, p. 32; THOMAN, E., JOLLS, T.: Media Literacy-A National Priority for a Changing World. In *American Behavioral Scientist*, 2004, Vol. 48, No. 1, p. 23.

<sup>6</sup> THOMAN, E., JOLLS, T.: Media Literacy-A National Priority for a Changing World. In *American Behavioral Scientist*, 2004, Vol. 48, No. 1, p. 24.

<sup>7</sup> CHRIST, W.: Assessment, Media Literacy Standards, and Higher Education. In *American Behavioral Scientist*, 2004, Vol. 48, No. 1, p. 92-94.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 95.

<sup>9</sup> BAYLEN, D., D'ALBA, A. (eds.): *Essentials of Teaching and Integrating Visual and Media Literacy: Visualizing Learning*. Cham, New York : Springer International Publishing Switzerland, 2015, p. 15.

<sup>10</sup> THOMAN, E., JOLLS, T.: Media Literacy-A National Priority for a Changing World. In *American Behavioral Scientist*, 2004, Vol. 48, No. 1, p. 20-23.

<sup>11</sup> See: POTTER, W.: The State of Media Literacy. In *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media*, 2010, Vol. 54, No. 4, p. 676-678; HOBBS, R.: Improving Reading Comprehension by Using Media Literacy Activities. In *Voices from the Middle*, 2001, Vol. 8, No. 4, p. 419-425.

<sup>12</sup> See: ROGOW, F.: Shifting from Media to Literacy. In *American Behavioral Scientist*, 2004, Vol. 48, No. 1, p. 31; THOMAN, E., JOLLS, T.: Media Literacy-A National Priority for a Changing World. In *American Behavioral Scientist*, 2004, Vol. 48, No. 1, p. 20; LUKE, C.: As Seen on TV or Was that My Phone? New Media Literacy. In *Policy Futures in Education*, 2007, Vol. 5, No. 1, p. 50; VAN DE VORD, R.: Distance Students and Online Research: Promoting Information Literacy through Media Literacy. In *Internet and Higher Education*, 2010, Vol. 13, p. 170; KELLNER, D., SHARE, J.: Critical Media Literacy: Crucial Policy Choices for a Twenty-First-Century Democracy. In *Policy Futures in Education*, 2007, Vol. 5, No. 1, p. 59; FLEMING, J.: Media Literacy, News Literacy, or News Appreciation? A case Study of the News Literacy Program at Stony Brook University. In *Journalism and Mass Communication Editor*, 2014, Vol. 69, No. 2, p. 149; VRAGA, E., TULLY, M.: Effectiveness of a Non-Classroom Media Literacy Intervention Among Different Undergraduate Populations. In *Journalism and Mass Communication Editor*, 2016, Vol. 71, No. 4, p. 440; MAKSL, A. et al.: The Usefulness of a News Media Literacy Curriculum. In *Journalism and Mass Communications Educator*, 2017, Vol. 72, No. 2, p. 230.

with information, digital, and technology literacy.<sup>13</sup> The most accepted definition of media literacy tends to align with Hobb's 2001 definition: „...accessing, analyzing, evaluating, and communicating.“<sup>14</sup>

There are those in media studies that argue media production should also be a requirement of media literacy.<sup>15</sup> While this provides for general competencies, it does not provide educators with measurable objectives or outcomes. Thoman and Jolls developed a framework and set of key questions that does; it addresses the social construction of media and meaning, the use of codified language and expression in media, difference of perspective, values, and biases, and the underlying power structure in communication.<sup>16</sup>

Other significant issues related to media literacy include representation, social justice, an educated and empowered citizenry, and livelihood of democracy.<sup>17</sup> Representation and agency are critical, but they are often only taught in relation to higher level media and scholarship.<sup>18</sup> There is still debate on whether more common or mundane forms of media, including television and social media, should be analyzed at this level.<sup>19</sup> Given the volume with which Americans consume information in these formats, whether for entertainment or news, it is important to teach users to apply the same standards of analysis to all formats of information.<sup>20</sup>

In line with the social justice agenda, scholars in media studies and librarianship also contend that inadequate access to technology and information and/or media literacy education further disenfranchises socio-economically challenged populations.<sup>21</sup> At issue too is the need to teach students at all levels to analyze mainstream social, television, and news media with the same

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<sup>13</sup> See: THOMAN, E., JOLLS, T.: Media Literacy-A National Priority for a Changing World. In *American Behavioral Scientist*, 2004, Vol. 48, No. 1, p. 20; FLEMING, J.: Media Literacy, News Literacy, or News Appreciation? A case Study of the News Literacy Program at Stony Brook University. In *Journalism and Mass Communication Editor*, 2014, Vol. 69, No. 2, p. 148-149; KELLNER, D., SHARE, J.: Critical Media Literacy: Crucial Policy Choices for a Twenty-First-Century Democracy. In *Policy Futures in Education*, 2007, Vol. 5, No. 1, p. 61; VAN DE VORD, R.: Distance Students and Online Research: Promoting Information Literacy through Media Literacy. In *Internet and Higher Education*, 2010, Vol. 13, No. 3, p. 171.

<sup>14</sup> HOBBS, R.: The State of Media Literacy: A Response to Potter. In *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media*, 2011, Vol. 55, No. 3, p. 45.

<sup>15</sup> See: ROGOW, F.: Shifting from Media to Literacy. In *American Behavioral Scientist*, 2004, Vol. 48, No. 1; THOMAN, E., JOLLS, T.: Media Literacy-A National Priority for a Changing World. In *American Behavioral Scientist*, 2004, Vol. 48, No. 1; KELLNER, D., SHARE, J.: Critical Media Literacy: Crucial Policy Choices for a Twenty-First-Century Democracy. In *Policy Futures in Education*, 2007, Vol. 5, No. 1; HAMMER, R.: Critical Media Literacy as Engaged Pedagogy. In *E-Learning and Digital Media*, 2011, Vol. 8, No. 4, p. 361.

<sup>16</sup> THOMAN, E., JOLLS, T.: Media Literacy-A National Priority for a Changing World. In *American Behavioral Scientist*, 2004, Vol. 48, No. 1, p. 25-27.

<sup>17</sup> See: JONES-JANG, S. et al.: Does Media Literacy Help Identification of Fake News? Information Literacy Helps, but Other Literacies Don't. In *American Behavioral Scientist*, 2019, Vol. 68.; CHRIST, W.: Assessment, Media Literacy Standards, and Higher Education. In *American Behavioral Scientist*, 2004, Vol. 48, No. 1; POTTER, W.: The State of Media Literacy. In *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media*, 2010, Vol. 54, No. 4; HOBBS, R.: The State of Media Literacy: A Response to Potter. In *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media*, 2011, Vol. 55, No. 3.

<sup>18</sup> See: POTTER, W.: The State of Media Literacy. In *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media*, 2010, Vol. 54, No. 4; HOBBS, R.: The State of Media Literacy: A Response to Potter. In *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media*, 2011, Vol. 55, No. 3; JONES-JANG, S. et al.: Does Media Literacy Help Identification of Fake News? Information Literacy Helps, but Other Literacies Don't. In *American Behavioral Scientist*, 2019, Vol. 68.

<sup>19</sup> See: CHRIST, W.: Assessment, Media Literacy Standards, and Higher Education. In *American Behavioral Scientist*, 2004, Vol. 48, No. 1; THOMAN, E., JOLLS, T.: Media Literacy-A National Priority for a Changing World. In *American Behavioral Scientist*, 2004, Vol. 48, No. 1; FLEMING, J.: Media Literacy, News Literacy, or News Appreciation? A case Study of the News Literacy Program at Stony Brook University. In *Journalism and Mass Communication Editor*, 2014, Vol. 69, No. 2.

<sup>20</sup> JONES-JANG, S. et al.: Does Media Literacy Help Identification of Fake News? Information Literacy Helps, but Other Literacies Don't. In *American Behavioral Scientist*, 2019, Vol. 68, p. 12-14.

<sup>21</sup> HAMMER, R.: Critical Media Literacy as Engaged Pedagogy. In *E-Learning and Digital Media*, 2011, Vol. 8, No. 4, p. 360.

lenses applied to print media and film in order address issues in identity politics, representation, and equal treatment in government and society.<sup>22</sup> Many assume that these digital natives are familiar with the concepts of media literacy because of their demonstrated proficiency with the technology, but that is not the case.<sup>23</sup> Students need faculty in all disciplines, and by virtue of their role in information literacy, librarians, to teach them these skills and provide them access to information.

### 3. Methods of Instruction

The ACRL's Framework for Information Literacy in Higher Education (the Framework) was created in 2015 to re-invigorate the previous standards for information literacy, and push student understanding away from just a set of learned skills, and forward into a more conceptual and dynamic understanding of information literacy.<sup>24</sup> The Framework allows for instructor creativity and does not dictate specifically how librarian instructors should address each of the frames within their own instruction, but instead provides examples and possibilities for how to extend each of these frames into the classroom. Librarian instructors at California State University, Bakersfield (CSUB) began incorporating the Framework into all aspects of the information literacy program including one-shots for general education courses, subject orientations, workshops, and full-semester library courses.

Currently, librarians at CSUB offer a one-unit, full semester, general studies course on information literacy, which is offered during the academic year, and also during both winter and summer sessions. Prior to 2016, the library's GST 1110 course, Research Sources and Skills, had been taught as a face-to-face class, but in 2017 it was moved to a fully online course. Moving to online allowed a reevaluation of the syllabus, and the Framework was implemented into nearly all aspects of the course. Two different librarian instructors have taught the class since 2017, both devoting significant time to media literacy concepts and the importance of information literacy skills in day to day life. The challenges of teaching media literacy within short, traditional library instruction sessions will be compared to that of the more in-depth instruction found within full semester library research courses.

While the vagueness of the Framework has often been seen as a negative, in reality it allows librarians to extend information literacy concepts beyond traditional academic instruction and provides an avenue for the incorporation of media literacy concepts into the same classroom atmospheres that they are used to teaching within. At CSUB, librarians addressed these topics in a variety of different ways including First-Year-Experience orientations that dealt with Fake News and evaluation, within English research and composition courses, library sponsored workshops on identifying fake news, plagiarism, and the evaluation process, and within full-semester library courses. It is within these full-semester library courses that the implementation of the Framework can be most thoroughly expanded and media literacy concepts and skills can be built upon

Traditional information literacy courses place a significant focus on academic research with the end goal of instilling in students the skills needed to find, evaluate, and responsibly use information within the confines of scholarly or academic work. Students at the university level are often immediately immersed into the rigors of academic research with librarians playing a significant role in the development of early information literacy skills.

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<sup>22</sup> HAMMER, R.: Critical Media Literacy as Engaged Pedagogy. In *E-Learning and Digital Media*, 2011, Vol. 8, No. 4, p. 360.

<sup>23</sup> KIVILUOTO, J.: Information Literacy and Diginatives: Expanding the Role of Academic Libraries. In *International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions*, 2015, Vol. 41, No. 4, p. 309-310.

<sup>24</sup> *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education*. [online]. [2020-04-05]. Available at: <<http://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/ilframework>>.



First-Year-Experience courses are a common place to introduce freshmen to the library, its services and resources. While the general orientations, scavenger hunts, and library tours that are often utilized in these courses can provide awareness of the library, more in-depth instruction within them is not easily done. As FYE courses continue to grow, librarians assigned to each of these sections prioritize the exploration of the library resources over other components of information literacy or media literacy. As students progress through their majors, subsequent librarian visits and instruction may begin to incorporate deeper evaluative skills and even include components of media literacy and evaluation of various media sources. The incorporation of media literacy into a librarian's subject area is at the discretion of the librarian and the overall learning outcomes for that particular course or discipline.

Contrary to popular academic research, many introductory speech courses allow students to present on a wide array of topics from the popular to the academic and mundane to inflammatory. In these classes, students utilize a wide variety of sources, but it is difficult to explain, in a fifty to seventy-five minute session, why they should be so careful with the information they present.

Instructors for the campus' introductory public speaking course will schedule one-shot library instruction to not only provide students with access to functional information literacy instruction, but also for assistance in identifying and evaluating information appropriate to the subject and format of the speech the students develop. The functional literacy portion of the class mimics that provided to the freshmen composition students. Depending on the number of sessions allocated to the librarian, this content is covered in thirty to forty-five minutes both to provide time for the discussion of source evaluation but also because most of these students have completed or are co-enrolled in freshmen composition when they take public speaking. They will generally meet with librarians twice in their first year to learn how to search for, access, and retrieve resources from the library and the open web.

What makes these one-shots different from the freshmen composition classes, and from most other information literacy one-shots, is the need to emphasize the evaluation of popular and mainstream media sources. Within communications and media studies, students receive in-depth instruction in the construction, purpose, and codification of media and messaging. In this first course, they need instruction on differentiating the different formats of information so they can learn when to use them. In this instruction, students learn to retrieve, identify, and evaluate information from news sources, data and public opinion polls, blogs or social media content, government documents, and scholarly and/or peer-reviewed sources. Given that students meet with the librarian for only one or two sessions, all of this information is condensed to fit class sessions of 50 to 75 minutes.

There is not enough time to provide depth of analysis of these forms of information, and so students are reduced to evaluating sources from short, prescriptive checklists. It becomes the course instructor's duty to provide students instruction in the more in-depth, critical analysis of context, subtext, intent, and meaning. It is necessary in these situations for instruction and library faculty to work together to provide these students with the basic tenets of media literacy to complete their course. Anecdotally, it is rare to see many of these students develop the broader awareness of their personal consumption of information in any of these terms. More often than not, students still seek out the convenient rather than the complex and credible.

At CSUB, General Studies 1110, Research Sources and Skills, is taught every term and incorporates the basics of information literacy for academic research. In recent semesters, however, the course has begun to incorporate more aspects of media literacy as well. Librarian instructors differ in their approaches and coursework, but the course objectives are the same and include the following:

- Develop basic information literacy skills.
- Demonstrate critical thinking and information literacy.
- Evaluate contexts, attitudes, values, and responses to different audiences.
- Identify and use research tools appropriate to their immediate information need(s).

- Apply a variety of search strategies and techniques to retrieving resources relevant to their immediate information need(s).
- Find diverse, reputable sources for an academic research paper.
- Use logical reasoning, at the appropriate level, to develop and organize ideas.

One librarian's approach to teaching the GST course has been to use the Framework to guide the trajectory of the class. Early coursework pulls in traditional information literacy skills and develops searching and evaluating skills with a focus on authorship, audience, information creation and value, and scholarly conversation. Student assignments begin with a focus on reference materials and background information, and focus on the frames four and six, which address research as inquiry, and searching as a strategic exploration. This theme is carried on throughout the entire course even as other frame are developed and explored. Early assignments include academic sources from reference databases to show early on the purpose of background research, and include quick comparisons between Google searches and database searches. As students learn the basics of database searching, the importance of information creation as a process is explored and clear distinctions between scholarly, trade, and popular material are made. Once students are able to locate possible articles and resources on the topics they are exploring, the first frame, Authority is Constructed and Contextual, is addressed. Students take three of their resources and take an in-depth look at who the author is and identify profession, credentials, and previous writings that may help the student understand who is writing their resource and whether or not it allows them to have more confidence in the „*authority*“ of the item. Students are also asked in a discussion post to explain who their authorities are in each of their individual majors and interact with each other to see how different majors hold different types of „*authorities*“ on their topics.

As the different frames are introduced and explored, the topic of media literacy is introduced during the second half of the semester. At this point, students have explored differences in information quality and authorship from databases and open web searches, and when news or other media sources are explored, it is a basic expectation that students would vet out the resource, look at how it was created, who created it, and why the source may or may not hold credible weight. Two weeks are devoted to this topic, and the first introductory assignment asks students to read the Stanford History Group's report that describes students' ability to discern the credibility of information online as „*bleak*.“<sup>25</sup> Students are asked to describe how they get their news information and how they think they would fare in a similar study. The following week explores false information in different platforms including social media, and moves students towards an understanding that even within the onslaught of information we receive in our daily tech filled lives, they have the ability to recognize red flags and treat information sources with a healthy sense of skepticism before using the information.

After the library instruction coordinator realigned the goals and objectives for the general studies information literacy course with the ACRL Framework, adapting the assignments was not difficult. What was more difficult was migrating readings and lecture content from face-to-face to online-only instruction. With the addition of Credo Instruct! videos and tutorials, existing lectures were modified, recorded, and posted in print and video formats for students to access. In lieu of one required textbook, students were assigned chapters from various composition textbooks, information literacy guides, handbooks on media literacy, and journal articles. The intent of the course is to provide students with sufficient time to see information literacy skills modeled, read about or hear them explained from a practical and theoretical perspective, and engage in active learning strategies to cultivate mastery.

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<sup>25</sup> WINEBURG, S. et al.: *Evaluating Information: The Cornerstone of Civic Online Reasoning*. [online]. [2020-04-09]. Available at: <<https://stacks.stanford.edu/file/druid:fv751yt5934/SHEG%20Evaluating%20Information%20Online.pdf>>.

Another librarian's approach to the course is, for the most part, self-paced, and students complete assessments to measure retention in addition to assignments requiring them to both demonstrate mastery of the more procedural aspects of information literacy and evaluate the information they locate. These readings and tasks support the learning outcomes related to identifying appropriate databases and resources, using logical reasoning, and applying different search strategies as needed for those resources and the topic.

The course is divided into eleven modules over sixteen weeks. Students begin, in the first six modules, with the basic definitions, processes, and procedures involved in research. They learn the vocabulary associated with information literacy; they learn a little about computer operations and indexing; and they learn a lot about organization. Despite the perception that digital natives have a better understanding of how to use technology, this content is sometimes difficult for students to digest because they often think of research as a single transaction.<sup>26</sup> Information literacy instruction is fraught with obstacles like this: students want or settle for what is found quickly, easily accessible, and not too difficult (or too long) to read.<sup>27</sup> While, at this point, students are not required to read and evaluate the information they locate, they are required to refine and repeat their searches in different venues to gather as many diverse sources as possible.

Once students build confidence in their ability to search for and retrieve information, they move to the more conceptual issues associated with evaluation of sources. This is where students begin to apply aspects of both information and media literacy. Within the confines of information literacy, students research the author's affiliation, expertise, and previous publications. They investigate the publication: its publisher, editorial board, and affiliated associations. They also evaluate the information objects for currency, accuracy, and reliability of the cited sources. Students are familiarized with the concepts of authority, bias, and peer-review. Within the context of media literacy, students investigate the information object in the context of the author's experience, goals, agenda, and/or purpose.

In a typical one-shot instruction session, these concepts are explained in less than 30 minutes and, if time permits, students have the opportunity to evaluate an artifact they found themselves. Though more typically, students follow along with their instructors as the process of evaluation is demonstrated to the class live or via tutorial. In one-shot instruction, this aspect of information literacy is still procedural. In a term-long course, this instruction takes place in the course of a week or two with exercises in choosing and evaluating multiple information resources for author credibility, reputation of the publication, and the quality of the sources cited in the work, among other concepts.

Another advantage to providing longer term information literacy is the time devoted to exploring information in different formats. This specifically draws from media literacy as students are introduced to the concept of different formats for different messages or intent. For instance, blog and social media posts are very different from news broadcasts or newspaper articles, though they are both often used to disseminate the news. Discussing the different use cases for each format, and the implications of such, can be done in a one- or two-week unit on information sources where it would likely be glossed over or omitted from one-shot instruction. In classes where writing and crafting an argument are important, the teaching faculty may well provide that context, but in an upper division course, it is more likely that students will be limited to the use of scholarly and/or peer-reviewed books and articles. Such limits may be necessary to teach students about scholarship, but they do not teach students how to apply critical thinking to media consumption outside the academy.

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<sup>26</sup> KIVILUOTO, J.: Information Literacy and Digital Literacy: Expanding the Role of Academic Libraries. In *International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions*, 2015, Vol. 41, No. 4, p. 309-310.

<sup>27</sup> VAN DE VORD, R.: Distance Students and Online Research: Promoting Information Literacy through Media Literacy. In *Internet and Higher Education*, 2010, Vol. 13, No. 3, p. 171.

The real challenge in information and media literacy instruction is conveying to students the implications for ethics in information use and creation. In an information literacy one-shot session, students may be reminded to cite their sources or to only use the resources from the library, but the larger discussion of why is avoided out of a lack of time. In this version of the general studies course, two modules are dedicated to information ethics in the academy and in everyday life. This may be the only time outside a communications, sociology, or political science class where students are schooled in the implications of their own personal communication and consumption of media.

In the unit on information ethics in the academy, students are provided with content related to ethics, intellectual property and copyright concerns, and the campus academic integrity policy. Students review this content and are assigned readings related to violations in professional ethics in the news. Students are asked to evaluate the violation, usually cases of plagiarism or fabricated data, based upon the following criteria:

- How does the context of the information change once you know it is plagiarized or fabricated?
- What could happen to information consumers who do not know the information is plagiarized or fabricated?
- What were some of the consequences for these behaviours?
- How many people do you think plagiarize or fabricate data often?
- What are some of the motivations for plagiarizing or fabricating data?
- Are there situations where these activities are acceptable? Explain.
- Why do you think people are so concerned about these issues?
- How do issues like these apply to education?
- How do issues like these apply in everyday life?

In a face to face seminar, these questions would be part of an ongoing dialogue amongst the class. In the online environment, these questions can be answered individually or via a discussion board. In a one-shot instruction session, unless this was the only topic of discussion, this level of analysis does not happen. In terms of reinforcing basic skills across the curriculum and over time, this is one of the more contentious issues in the academy. In their 2015 article, Kashian, Cruz, Jang, and Silk report, „[s]tudents need more instruction on plagiarism and seem to appreciate it when they receive it.“<sup>28</sup> If faculty librarians teach information acquisition, evaluation, and citation, it stands to reason that responsible use of that information should also be a talking point. In the context of media literacy, the creation of information is just as important at the use and interpretation of information. Media literacy focuses on the intent, subtext, and implications of the medium and the message; this also includes the ethical conditions under which the information was created and used. It illustrates the power structure and agenda setting inherent in communication.

The last content module of the course focuses on the ethical use of information in everyday life. Students are asked to read reports on the creation and effects of fake news. They are provided social media examples of fake news, bias, misinformation, and satire. With the criteria they learned to apply to information for academic purposes, students are asked to evaluate these information objects they would normally encounter in their daily lives. Upon evaluating the objects, students are asked to consider, and respond, how accepting and/or sharing this information might affect themselves and others. Students are taught to fact check non-academic information with the hope that this level of self-reflection and agency will deepen their awareness, and even skepticism, of the encoded messages in the media they consume daily. This last

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<sup>28</sup> KASHIAN, N. et al.: Evaluation of an Instructional Activity to Reduce Plagiarism in the Communication Classroom. In *Journal of Academic Ethics*, 2015, Vol. 13, No. 3, p. 252.

module is meant to address the issues of social justice, informed citizenry, and democracy that are so ingrained in media and cultural studies. Without the time and platform to explore these forms of media in opposition to media created for academic or research purposes, most students would not encounter these critical literacies outside a communications or social science classroom.

## 4. Discussion of Limits in Instruction

There is no argument that information and media literacy are important to student success in or out of the academy. However, at CSUB, there is no general education requirement for coursework in information or media literacy. It is required that faculties integrate the concepts of these skill sets into their own curriculum. While this does support the reinforcement of these skills, it remains undetermined how many faculties actually orient students to the skill sets in the first place. When librarians are consulted to provide instruction, it is often as a result of the students demonstrating to faculties that they do not have these skills, i.e. students are unable to select, evaluate, and synthesize appropriate information for the required assignment. The time allocated to the librarian, is insufficient to introduce students to the necessary skill sets and for them to develop mastery. In tandem, not all disciplines integrate library instruction, so students receive inconsistent training in developing these critical literacy skills.

## 5. Conclusion and Future Research

At CSUB, the librarians recognize the need for further integration of research and evaluation skills. The unit has developed successful relationships with several departments, across the university. Librarians regularly participate in teaching and learning activities with various campus institutes and centres to better hone their teaching skills but also to make teaching faculties aware of the skills sets and services the library faculty provides with regards to instruction. To better serve the whole campus population, the library needs to investigate developing its own learning community to draw together faculties from all disciplines in defining a single set of information and media literacy competencies outside of each discipline's professional guidelines so students receive consistent messages about information consumption. To further facilitate consistency, the library is also investigating other methods for delivering subject-specific information literacy instruction to students, for elective credit.

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Viera Kačínová

# The Topic Of Media-Disseminated Mis-Information And Dis-Information As An Integral Part Of General Education In Slovakia

## ABSTRACT

The occurrence and spreading of online mis-information and dis-information is a phenomenon that adversely affects various areas of social and political life on a global scale. At the transnational (especially European) level, regulatory mechanisms are currently being sought, which would be able to limit their occurrence or easy distribution through online space - or possibly to enable an individual to build up a defence against their influence. Defensive instruments are designed specifically at the educational level. In Slovakia, the issue is currently being given more attention in the context of school education in connection with initiatives of the teachers and institutions that create educational projects and campaigns as well as methodological tools for the implementation of the topic in education (cf. Kačínová, 2018). However, these should be supported by a compulsory curriculum, specific educational topics and educational objectives. The present study examines the situation in Slovakia with focus on the lower secondary and upper (complete) secondary general education.

## KEY WORDS

Mis-Information. Dis-Information. Fake news. Information Disorder. Media and Information literacy. Complete secondary general education. Learning standards. National Educational Programme. Slovak school.

# 1. Introduction

The current extent of dissemination of media (online) content representing reduced quality of information at the level of false information and the degree of its individual as well as social impact has resulted in international strategic initiatives aimed not only at regulating the problem but also at developing appropriate measures.<sup>1</sup> A conceptual framework for **typologizing false content disseminated via social networks was introduced in the** Council of Europe's *Information Disorder Report* of November 2017. It contains the concept of the so-called *Information Disorder* and specification of their three basic categories:

- a) *Mis-Information*. Information that is false, but not created with the intention of causing harm; it is also false information that is disseminated, but not with the intention of causing harm;
- b) *Dis-Information*. Information that is false and deliberately created to harm a person, social group, organization or country; it is also false information that is deliberately disseminated to cause harm;
- c) *Mal-Information*. Information that is based on reality, used to inflict harm on a person, organization or country; it is also the dissemination of genuine information that causes harm, often by publishing information of a private nature.<sup>2</sup>

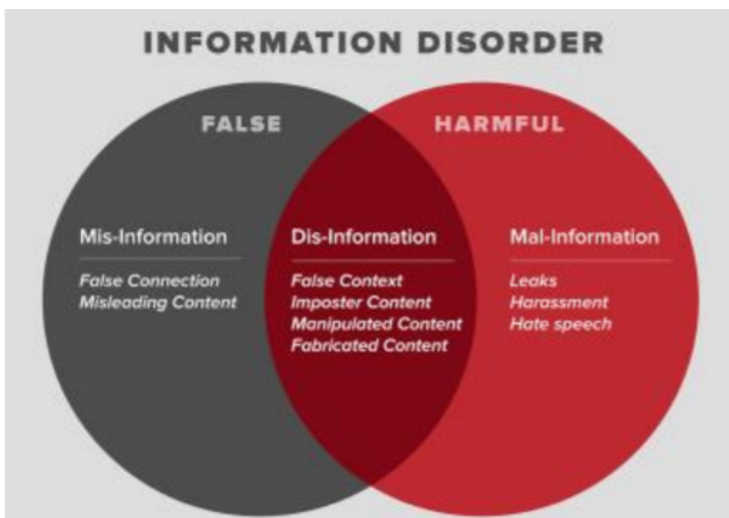


FIGURE 1. A model of three types of the so-called information disorder according to Wardle

Source: WARDLE, C., DERAKHSHAN, H.: *Information disorder: Toward an interdisciplinary framework for research and policy making*. Strasbourg : Council of Europe, 2017, p. 20.

This model attempts to show the intersection of the individual types of information disorder around the concepts of falseness and harm. It includes some types of hate speech and harassment under the mal-information category, as people can be targeted using real information (for example targeting someone based on their religion) to cause harm.<sup>3</sup> In terms of the occurrence of the individual types of false information and content („fake news“, hoaxes, conspiracy theories), the intersection can be perceived especially between the first

<sup>1</sup> Compare to: HOSSOVÁ, M.: Fake News and Disinformation: Phenomenons of Post-Factual Society. In *Media Literacy and Academic Research*, 2018, Vol. 1, No. 2, p. 27-35.

<sup>2</sup> WARDLE, C., DERAKHSHAN, H.: *Information disorder: Toward an interdisciplinary framework for research and policy making*. Strasbourg : Council of Europe, 2017, p. 20.

<sup>3</sup> WARDLE, C., DERAKHSHAN, H.: *Information disorder: Toward an interdisciplinary framework for research and policy making*. Strasbourg : Council of Europe, 2017, p. 20.

two categories. At the same time, the authors of the study suggest a relation between the third type of information disorder and the first two categories.<sup>4</sup> Also the so-called misleading content which, in the light of the above typology, is classified in the first category, should be classified in the category of dis-information if there is the intention of the creator or disseminator to cause harm. A more precise enumeration of the different types of mis-information and dis-information circulating in the information ecosystem is presented in the *First Draft* approach<sup>5</sup>.



FIGURE 2: Types of Mis-and Disinformation according to Wardle

Source: WARDLE, C., DERAKHSHAN, H.: *Information disorder: Toward an interdisciplinary framework for research and policy making*. Strasbourg : Council of Europe, 2017, p. 20.

In view of the impact and damage caused, there is a particular threat of disinformation, which is the umbrella concept for types of intentionally created or disseminated content lacking information quality and of a detrimental nature. According to P. Nutil, the concept refers to deceptive, misleading, false information intended to influence the judgment and opinion of an individual, multiple persons or the whole of society. In terms of meaning, it coincides with „fake news“, some hoaxes or conspiracies.<sup>6</sup> Distinguishing disinformation from other types of similar unreliable information is well reflected in the definition of the Communication from the European Commission *Tackling online disinformation: a European approach* COM (2018) 236 of 26. 4. 2018. In this document, disinformation is understood „as verifiably false or misleading information that is created, presented and disseminated for economic gain or to intentionally deceive the public, and may cause public harm. Public harm comprises threats to democratic political and policymaking processes as well as public goods such as the protection of EU citizens' health, the environment or security. Disinformation does not include reporting errors, satire and parody, or clearly identified partisan news and commentary.“<sup>7</sup>

<sup>4</sup> WARDLE, C., DERAKHSHAN, H.: *Information disorder: Toward an interdisciplinary framework for research and policy making*. Strasbourg : Council of Europe, 2017, p. 21.

<sup>5</sup> WARDLE, C.: *Fake news. It's complicated*. [online]. [2019-02-27]. Available at: <<https://firstdraftnews.org/fake-news-complicated/>>.

<sup>6</sup> NUTIL, P.: *Médiá, lži a příliš rychlý mozek: Průvodce postpravdivým světem*. Praha : Grada, 2018, p. 18.

<sup>7</sup> *European Commission. Tackling online disinformation: a European Approach. Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions*. [online]. [2019-02-20]. Available at: <<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1585378190912&uri=CELEX:52018DC0236>>.

Eliminating the causes of the massive spread of online information disorder substantially relates to the need to develop specific educational measures at the educational level for both professional media content creators and their users.<sup>8</sup> In a particular way, it is covered by the concept of MIL (UNESCO). This holistic concept, cumulating several types of literacy or competences related to information and media, within the context of this topic, includes in particular:

- a) Competent work with information and media resources - access, analysis, critical evaluation, production and use of information and its communication (especially in the media and through the media) – these are the basic qualities contained in most MIL (UNESCO) definition approaches.<sup>9</sup>;
- b) Journalistic literacy (includes literacy in the field of journalistic professional and ethical standards, especially understanding of language and reporting conventions as a genre, recognizing how they can be misused for harmful purposes; recognizing and distinguishing quality journalism from pseudo-journalism (dubious quality information), the ability to recognize and resist manipulation in relation to disinformation presented as reports).<sup>10</sup>;
- c) Human rights literacy (right to freedom of expression, right of everyone to seek, receive and impart information and ideas; use information, media and technology to defend human rights in their diversity, strengthen intercultural and inter-religious dialogue, defend privacy and combating all forms of inequality, hatred, intolerance, violence and extremism).<sup>11</sup>

The application of effective educational strategies to confront phenomena such as „fake news“ or hoaxes relates to the development of focal target dimensions of media literacy or media competence, especially the ability to recognize and evaluate media content:

- Masterful orientation in various written and spoken communications, along with the ability to quickly distinguish essential factual information from an „information ballast“;
- Recognition of hidden meanings, manipulation techniques, inaccurate, incomplete information, statements;
- Distinguishing a serious, verified message/statement from a subjective, non-factual communication<sup>12</sup>;
- Evaluating the communication intent of media statements, associating them with other statements.<sup>13</sup>

The development of the ability to differentiate information according to the quality and identification of mis-information and dis-information in symbiosis with an understanding of the socio-ethical contexts of the occurrence and impact of information disorder is becoming

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<sup>8</sup> Compare to: Directorate-General for Communications Networks, Content and Technology. (European Commission). *A multi-dimensional approach to disinformation : Report of the independent High level Group on fake news and online disinformation approach to disinformation*. Luxembourg : European Union, 2018.; IRETON, CH., POSETTI, J. et. al.: *Journalism, 'Fake News' & Disinformation : Handbook for Journalism Education and Training*. [online]. Paris : UNESCO, 2018.

<sup>9</sup> HOPE CULVER, S., GRIZZLE, A.: *Survey on Privacy in Media and Information Literacy with Youth Perspectives*. Paris : UNESCO, 2017. [online]. [2019-04-01]. Available at: <<https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000258993>>.

<sup>10</sup> Compare to: IRETON, CH., POSETTI, J. et. al.: *Journalism, 'Fake News' & Disinformation : Handbook for Journalism Education and Training*. Paris : UNESCO, 2018.

<sup>11</sup> GRIZZLE, A., SINGH, J.: Five Laws of Media and Information Literacy as Harbingers of Human Rights: A Legacy of Ranganathan's Five Laws of Library Science. In SINGH, J., KERR, P. et al. (eds.): *MILID Yearbook 2016. Media and Information Literacy: Enabling Human Rights, Countering, Hate, Radical and Violent Extremism*. Paris : UNESCO, 2016, p. 24-39. [online]. [2019-04-01]. Available at: <<https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000246371>>.

<sup>12</sup> NIKLESOVÁ, E.: *Mediální gramotnost a mediální výchova*. České Budějovice : Vlastimil Johanus, 2010, p. 24.

<sup>13</sup> MIČIENKA, M., JIRÁK, J. a kol.: *Základy mediální výchovy*. Praha : Portál, 2007, p. 9.



an important part of media education or journalistic alphabetization models. Pérez Tornero et al. define two basic models:

- a) The instrumental model which is based solely on learning about the technical differences between false reports and verified journalistic information.
- b) A model that is more closely linked to the problem of creating a democratic society and respect for human rights.<sup>14</sup>

The first model preferably includes the development of knowledge, abilities and skills related to the differentiation of fact, false report and „*alternative fact*“ (or understanding of the mechanisms of their dissemination) and is centred on the epistemological values of truth and falsity. In the context of the complexity of the problems related to the occurrence and spread of online disinformation, this mechanistic model seems inadequate. Although in the context of the first instrumental model based on the aforementioned concept the development of an individual's qualities related to the technical aspect of distinguishing true and false reports on the Internet prevails, the model can be perceived more comprehensively. It regards the need to develop media competence in learners who should also have a certain level of philosophical (epistemological) understanding of the problem, centred specifically on the problem of media-presented truth in relation to objective truth.<sup>15</sup> The second, more complex model, puts media education processes in the broader context of defending social interest and is centred on the sustainability of social values, or values of humanism, human rights and democracy. However, the above-mentioned need to reconstruct the factual dimension of discourses and journalistic information remains essential in this model.<sup>16</sup> In the context of the second model, the development of media literacy is linked to the formation of the historical, civic, and ethical awareness of the individual. It concerns the development of qualities such as:

- To learn to identify dis-information supporting prejudices and not respecting the cultural differences of persons belonging to different minorities (especially Roma, immigrants), but also denying the universal validity of human rights and critically reflect on their consequences; at the same time it is necessary to develop value attitudes in the individual such as understanding, solidarity, respect, empathy, etc.;
- To know and understand to what extent certain disinformation campaigns are or may be aimed at discrediting international institutions (EU, NATO), countries (USA, Russia), aimed at challenging the existence and functioning of a democratic establishment, the validity of democratic values and anti-system-oriented; at the same time, learning to recognize the importance of core political institutions and concepts;
- To understand that certain historical events are a constant subject of conspiracy, at the same time to learn facts about historical phenomena, as well as to understand that there may not always be clear and definitive interpretations of them.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>14</sup> PÉREZ TORNERO, J. M. et al.: ¿Cómo afrontar las noticias falseadas mediante la alfabetización periodística? Estado de la cuestión. In *Doxa Comunicación*, 2018, Vol. 2, No. 26, p. 228. [online]. [2019-02-20]. Available at: <[http://dspace.ceu.es/bitstream/10637/9499/1/Como\\_JMPerez%26SSamy%26Stejedor%26CPulido\\_Doxa\\_Comuni\\_2018.pdf](http://dspace.ceu.es/bitstream/10637/9499/1/Como_JMPerez%26SSamy%26Stejedor%26CPulido_Doxa_Comuni_2018.pdf)>.

<sup>15</sup> Compare to: GÁLIKOVÁ-TOLNAIOVÁ, S.: Media and Truth in the Perspective of the Practice and Life Form of the Modern „Homo Medialis“. In *Communication Today*, 2019, Vol. 10, No. 1, p. 4-19.; FEDOROV, A., LEVITSKAYA, A.: Comparative Analysis of the Indicators' Levels of Students' Media Competence Development in the Control and Experimental Groups. In *International Journal of Media and Information Literacy*, 2017, Vol. 2, No. 1, p. 16-37.

<sup>16</sup> PÉREZ TORNERO, J. M. et al.: ¿Cómo afrontar las noticias falseadas mediante la alfabetización periodística? Estado de la cuestión. In *Doxa Comunicación*, 2018, Vol. 2, No. 26, p. 228. [online]. [2019-02-20]. Available at: <[http://dspace.ceu.es/bitstream/10637/9499/1/Como\\_JMPerez%26SSamy%26Stejedor%26CPulido\\_Doxa\\_Comuni\\_2018.pdf](http://dspace.ceu.es/bitstream/10637/9499/1/Como_JMPerez%26SSamy%26Stejedor%26CPulido_Doxa_Comuni_2018.pdf)>.

<sup>17</sup> KAČINOVÁ, V.: *Fenomén „fake news“, hoaxov a konšpiračných teórií v kontexte mediálnej výchovy*. Trnava : FMK UCM, 2019, p. 71.



## 2. Objective and methodology of research

Based on the need to develop resistance mechanisms of the individual to various types of information disorder as part of an action plan to address the dissemination and impact of online dis-information in EU countries, especially at school education level<sup>18</sup>, our research aimed to determine the level of implementation of the topic in compulsory school education in Slovakia. We focused on lower and upper secondary education, which we consider to be central to the topic.

The research problem was specified in the form of the following research questions:

RQ 1 *In which selected educational areas or subjects at the lower and upper level of general secondary education is the topic of mis-information and dis-information integrated?*

RQ 2 *How are the individual focal objectives of developing media literacy (MIL), in the intersection with the topic of mis-information and dis-information, incorporated into the compulsory subjects of the lower and upper secondary education?*

The methodological tool was a qualitative content analysis of the learning (performance and content) standards of selected compulsory subjects in the educational areas as part of the National Educational Programmes for lower secondary education and upper secondary education providing complete secondary general education.<sup>19</sup>

The following educational areas and subjects were selected as focal in the intersection with the topic:

- Language and communication (Slovak language and literature);
- Mathematics and Information Work (Informatics);
- Man and society (History, Civics);
- Man and values (Ethical Education, Religious Education /Religion – Catholic Church);
- The recommended target outcomes of the cross-curricular topic of media education for lower and upper secondary education.

The analytical categories of the content analysis were specified according to the above-mentioned focal categories of information disorder (mis-information, dis-information), the focal objectives of media literacy and MIL concept or journalistic alphabetization models.

## 3. Results

The issue of dis-information, false reports and hoaxes as a separate educational topic is new and not anchored in the content of compulsory school education in Slovakia. The analysis of curricular documents - innovated learning standards for compulsory subjects at lower and upper secondary level (the second grade of primary schools and grammar school - complete secondary general education) implies that its title is not explicitly mentioned in any thematic unit of the focal subjects. However, it can be implicitly identified primarily within the framework of the required development of pupils' ability to distinguish and assess the veracity of information resources, especially media sources. The development of these skills is required for pupils in the teaching of several subjects in educational areas. At the same time, the selected subjects contain further focal objectives overlapping with the topic.

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<sup>18</sup> E.g. „Council conclusions of 30 May 2016 on developing media literacy and critical thinking through education and training (2016/C 212/05), 2016; *Tackling online disinformation: a European Approach, 2018.*“

<sup>19</sup> These documents are the core curriculum documents setting out the compulsory content of school education at the various levels of education.

## Educational area: Language and Communication

### Slovak language and literature

Within the application of cross-subject competences to receive and process information and to think critically at grammar school, the pupils should be able to „*assess the credibility / reliability / relevance of the information sources on the basis of which the text was created*“ or „*perceive the problems raised by the text and to identify the errors and contradictions contained in the text*“ as well as „*to infer from the text information which does not appear directly in it but results from it*“, i. e. „*critically read the texts*“.<sup>20</sup> At the same time, within the development of communication language competences, pupils acquire knowledge of the journalistic style typical of mass-media production in comparison with other language styles (educational, administrative, speaking, colloquial).<sup>21</sup>

## Educational area: Mathematics and information work

### Informatics

The subject covered by the educational area is crucial in that area. In addition to developing the technical skills of working with new technologies, it focuses on using the Internet as a tool for gathering relevant information, which includes developing a reflective and assessment approach of pupils to the sources of information obtained, also in relation to the detection of potential manipulative elements. At grammar school, within the thematic unit Information Society - Security and Risks, the ability of pupils to „*evaluate the credibility of information on the Web*“<sup>22</sup> is developed. At the same time, in the thematic unit Communication and Cooperation - Web Search the pupil learns to „*evaluate search (e.g. accuracy and quality of the searched information ...)*“.<sup>23</sup> However, the topic of assessing the quality and credibility of information on the web is already addressed to pupils in primary schools. Within the subject, they also learn to develop their analytical and evaluation thinking in information work. In the 6th year, within the scope of the curriculum of Algorithmic problem solving - problem analysis, the pupil should be able to „*decide the truth/falseness of a statement, to choose elements or options according to the truth of the statement, to describe the relationship between information in their own words, to give a counterexample in which something does not apply*“.<sup>24</sup> In the same year, within the thematic unit Communication and Cooperation - Working with Websites, they learn to „*assess the purpose of the website*“.<sup>25</sup> The pupils leaving the 8th year, within the thematic unit Communication and Cooperation - Web Search, similarly to grammar school, should be able to „*find different types of information on the Web, assess the accuracy and quality of the information found*“.<sup>26</sup> Within the thematic unit Communication and Cooperation - Working with Communication Tools in the 6th year, pupils are required to acquire procedural knowledge

<sup>20</sup> Slovenský jazyk a literatúra – gymnázium so štvorročným a päťročným vzdelávacím programom. Vzdelávací štandard. Inovovaný štátny vzdelávací program. [online]. [2019-11-19]. Available at: <[https://www.statpedu.sk/files/sk/svp/inovovany-statny-vzdelavaci-program/inovovany-svp-gymnazia-so-stvorrocnym-patrocnym-vzdelavacim-programom/jazyk-komunikacia/slovensky\\_jazyk\\_a\\_literatura\\_g\\_4\\_5\\_r\\_novy.pdf](https://www.statpedu.sk/files/sk/svp/inovovany-statny-vzdelavaci-program/inovovany-svp-gymnazia-so-stvorrocnym-patrocnym-vzdelavacim-programom/jazyk-komunikacia/slovensky_jazyk_a_literatura_g_4_5_r_novy.pdf)>.

<sup>21</sup> Slovenský jazyk a literatúra – nižšie stredné vzdelávanie. Vzdelávací štandard. Inovovaný štátny vzdelávací program. [online]. [2019-11-19]. Available at: <[https://www.statpedu.sk/files/articles/dokumenty/inovovany-statny-vzdelavaci-program/sjl\\_nsv\\_2014.pdf](https://www.statpedu.sk/files/articles/dokumenty/inovovany-statny-vzdelavaci-program/sjl_nsv_2014.pdf)>.

<sup>22</sup> Informatika – gymnázium so štvorročným a päťročným vzdelávacím programom. Vzdelávací štandard. Inovovaný štátny vzdelávací program. [online]. [2019-11-30]. Available at: <[https://www.statpedu.sk/files/articles/dokumenty/inovovany-statny-vzdelavaci-program/informatika\\_g\\_4\\_5\\_r.pdf](https://www.statpedu.sk/files/articles/dokumenty/inovovany-statny-vzdelavaci-program/informatika_g_4_5_r.pdf)>.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Informatika – nižšie stredné vzdelávanie. Vzdelávací štandard. Inovovaný štátny vzdelávací program. [online]. [2019-11-19]. Available at: <[https://www.statpedu.sk/files/articles/dokumenty/inovovany-statny-vzdelavaci-program/informatika\\_nsv\\_2014.pdf](https://www.statpedu.sk/files/articles/dokumenty/inovovany-statny-vzdelavaci-program/informatika_nsv_2014.pdf)>.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

to follow the rules of netiquette<sup>27</sup>, which also implies the way of dealing with problematic online content. Similarly to grammar school, the thematic units Information Society - Security and Risks, Information Society - Digital Technologies in Society are specified in the 6th and 8th grades as focal in terms of the relevance of the issue. After their completion, pupils should be able to, for example, „discuss the risks on the Internet“ (know the risks on the Internet and social networks)... „discuss the credibility of information on the Web...“<sup>28</sup>

## Educational field: Man and society

### History

Primary and secondary school pupils learn to search for and use various sources and media resources to obtain relevant information about historical facts (e.g. newspapers, magazines, websites) that they also learn to verify. They learn to distinguish fact and fiction, critically evaluate various sources of information, for example, multiple websites on a single topic.<sup>29</sup> Pupils are required to ask adequate questions about historical facts in working with different sources of information, a certain research approach that creates the basic prerequisite for knowing and understanding the facts. The above-mentioned as well as media resources thus become instruments of cognition, understanding, exploration of history and historical events, phenomena and processes. The subject enables understanding the essence of the historical facts which become objects of dis-information or conspiracy. It also involves cultivating the pupils' historical consciousness „which reflects respect for other nations and ethnicities, as well as respect for cultural and other differences, people, different diversified groups and communities. It thus contributes to the development of the value scale of a democratic society. It also attaches importance to the democratic values of European civilization“.<sup>30</sup> Undermining and relativising these values are among the main objectives of disinformation campaigns.<sup>31</sup>

The subject of history, in particular, offers space for processing the educational topic in the classroom. The teaching should be aimed at developing pupils' ability to understand the breadth and importance of the influence of media on various aspects of the individual's social and life reality that they complete. They should be able to recognize, interpret and critically evaluate the influence of media on the construction as well as the configuration of areas of reality or history, including through the creation and communication of pseudo-facts, dis-information or myths. The starting point is a critical study, analysis and comparison of various information sources with the presented social as well as historical events.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>27</sup> *Informatika - nižšie stredné vzdelávanie. Vzdelávaci štandard. Inovovaný štátny vzdelávaci program.* [online]. [2019-11-19]. Available at: <[https://www.statpedu.sk/files/articles/dokumenty/inovovany-statny-vzdelavaci-program/informatika\\_nsv\\_2014.pdf](https://www.statpedu.sk/files/articles/dokumenty/inovovany-statny-vzdelavaci-program/informatika_nsv_2014.pdf)>.

<sup>28</sup> *Informatika – nižšie stredné vzdelávanie. Vzdelávaci štandard. Inovovaný štátny vzdelávaci program.* [online]. [2019-11-19]. Available at: <[https://www.statpedu.sk/files/articles/dokumenty/inovovany-statny-vzdelavaci-program/informatika\\_g\\_4\\_5\\_r.pdf](https://www.statpedu.sk/files/articles/dokumenty/inovovany-statny-vzdelavaci-program/informatika_g_4_5_r.pdf)>.

<sup>29</sup> *Dejepis - nižšie stredné vzdelávanie. Vzdelávaci štandard. Inovovaný štátny vzdelávaci program.* [online]. [2019-11-19]. Available at: <[https://www.statpedu.sk/files/articles/dokumenty/inovovany-statny-vzdelavaci-program/dejepis\\_nsv\\_2014.pdf](https://www.statpedu.sk/files/articles/dokumenty/inovovany-statny-vzdelavaci-program/dejepis_nsv_2014.pdf)>. cf. *Dejepis – gymnázium so štvorročným a päťročným vzdelávacím programom. Vzdelávaci štandard. Inovovaný štátny vzdelávaci program.* [online]. [2020-03-15]. Available at: <[http://www.statpedu.sk/files/articles/dokumenty/inovovany-statny-vzdelavaci-program/dejepis\\_g\\_4\\_5\\_r.pdf](http://www.statpedu.sk/files/articles/dokumenty/inovovany-statny-vzdelavaci-program/dejepis_g_4_5_r.pdf)>.

<sup>30</sup> *Dejepis – gymnázium so štvorročným a päťročným vzdelávacím programom. Vzdelávaci štandard. Inovovaný štátny vzdelávaci program.* [online]. [2020-03-15]. Available at: <[https://www.statpedu.sk/files/articles/dokumenty/inovovany-statny-vzdelavaci-program/dejepis\\_g\\_4\\_5\\_r.pdf](https://www.statpedu.sk/files/articles/dokumenty/inovovany-statny-vzdelavaci-program/dejepis_g_4_5_r.pdf)>.

<sup>31</sup> KOVANIČ, M.: *Dezinformácie a výučba informačnej gramotnosti na slovenských stredných školách.* Bratislava : Inštitút strategických politík n.o., 2018, p. 18.

<sup>32</sup> KAČINOVÁ, V.: *Hoaxy, fake news – problémové oblasti a metodické nástroje spracovania edukačnej témy v procese mediálnej výchovy.* In BUČKOVÁ, Z., RUSNÁKOVÁ, L., RYBANSKÝ, R. et al. (eds.): *Megatrendy a médiá 2018. Realita & mediálne bubliny.* Trnava : FMK UCM, 2018, p. 41.

## Civics

Another important subject in the content of which it is desirable to explicitly include the topic, but in the context of the required compulsory content of teaching at Slovak schools it is currently only implicitly implemented, is Civics. Currently, however, teaching the subject at both levels creates wider conditions for assimilating the educational theme by encouraging the development of pupils' cognitive activities in the form of exploratory learning and encouraging the search, exploration, discovery as a prerequisite for cognition and understanding of the present time<sup>33</sup>, including acquiring awareness of the functioning of national and transnational units (the European Union) and their institutions or basic concepts of state and law. The main objectives of the subject are to teach pupils to think and act democratically, recognize the basic principles of democracy, recognize their rights and obligations and defend the rights of others, acquire the rules and standards of social coexistence, take responsibility for one's own views, attitudes and consequences of action, build a tolerant approach to other views, attitudes, values and cultures as well as lead them to active civic engagement, one of the important preconditions of which is critical thinking.<sup>34</sup> The thematic unit Human Rights and Freedoms is particularly important in elementary school education, in which they learn to „*recognize the manifestations of discrimination in specific situations*“<sup>35</sup> and acquire knowledge of the concepts of human rights and freedoms, prejudices, discrimination. At grammar school, students acquire knowledge of similar issues (including the topic of extremism) within the thematic units Citizen and the State and Man and Society. In addition, students of grammar schools deal with, within the framework of acquiring the categorical conceptual apparatus of philosophy and the development of philosophical reasoning, epistemology and its problem areas (especially the objectivity of knowledge).<sup>36</sup> The application of these issues to current social problems, which inherently includes the field of online mis-information and dis-information, is a logical result of educational intentions. At the same time, a supplementary analysis of the issue at the level of complete secondary vocational education<sup>37</sup> shows that students learn to seek information about global problems and to evaluate them objectively as well as to distinguish facts from myths.<sup>38</sup> The learning standards thus specifically identify the issue of the spread of myths in the context of various global topics in today's world, so it can be stated that it explicitly responds to the spread of dis-information (although the term is not used in the standards).<sup>39</sup>

<sup>33</sup> *Občianska náuka – nižšie stredné vzdelávanie. Vzdelávací štandard. Inovovaný štátny vzdelávací program.* [online]. [2019-11-19]. Available at: <[https://www.statpedu.sk/files/articles/dokumenty/inovovany-statny-vzdelavaci-program/obcianska-nauka\\_nsv\\_2014.pdf](https://www.statpedu.sk/files/articles/dokumenty/inovovany-statny-vzdelavaci-program/obcianska-nauka_nsv_2014.pdf)>; cf. *Občianska náuka – gymnázium so štvorročným a päťročným vzdelávacím programom. Vzdelávací štandard. Inovovaný štátny vzdelávací program.* [online]. [2019-11-30]. Available at: <[https://www.statpedu.sk/files/articles/dokumenty/inovovany-statny-vzdelavaci-program/obcianska\\_nauka\\_g\\_4\\_5\\_r.pdf](https://www.statpedu.sk/files/articles/dokumenty/inovovany-statny-vzdelavaci-program/obcianska_nauka_g_4_5_r.pdf)>.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> *Občianska náuka – nižšie stredné vzdelávanie. Vzdelávací štandard. Inovovaný štátny vzdelávací program.* [online]. [2019-11-19]. Available at: <[https://www.statpedu.sk/files/articles/dokumenty/inovovany-statny-vzdelavaci-program/obcianska-nauka\\_nsv\\_2014.pdf](https://www.statpedu.sk/files/articles/dokumenty/inovovany-statny-vzdelavaci-program/obcianska-nauka_nsv_2014.pdf)>.

<sup>36</sup> *Občianska náuka – gymnázium so štvorročným a päťročným vzdelávacím programom. Vzdelávací štandard. Inovovaný štátny vzdelávací program.* [online]. [2019-11-30]. Available at: <[https://www.statpedu.sk/files/articles/dokumenty/inovovany-statny-vzdelavaci-program/obcianska\\_nauka\\_g\\_4\\_5\\_r.pdf](https://www.statpedu.sk/files/articles/dokumenty/inovovany-statny-vzdelavaci-program/obcianska_nauka_g_4_5_r.pdf)>.

<sup>37</sup> It is one of several forms of secondary vocational education taking place in secondary vocational schools, which represent a parallel system to secondary general education at grammar schools. This education system has a similar concept to that of grammar schools in general education subjects, but the content is reduced, in some areas modified, as in this case. Overall, however, the content of education is similar in the researched area, as evidenced by the analysis of the author. See: KOVANIČ, M.: *Dezinformácie a výučba informačnej gramotnosti na slovenských stredných školách.* Bratislava : Inštitút strategických politik n.o., 2018, p. 21.

<sup>38</sup> *Občianska náuka. Vzdelávací štandard pre študijné odbory, ktorých absolvovaním žiak získa úplné stredné odborné vzdelanie.* [online]. [2019-05-08]. Available at: <[http://siov.sk/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/obcianska\\_nauka\\_USOV.pdf](http://siov.sk/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/obcianska_nauka_USOV.pdf)>.

<sup>39</sup> Compare to: KOVANIČ, M.: *Dezinformácie a výučba informačnej gramotnosti na slovenských stredných školách.* Bratislava : Inštitút strategických politik n.o., 2018, p. 21.

## Educational area: Man and values

At both levels of education, the compulsorily optional subject of Ethical Education supports the issue especially in the development of literacy in the area of awareness raising and personality prerequisites for respecting human rights. Its aim is to „educate a personality with his/her own identity and value orientation, in which respect for man, life and nature, cooperation and prosociality occupy an important place“.<sup>40</sup> In particular, the development of prosociality, which is at the heart of the ethics of interpersonal relationships, with the value dimension of mutual human understanding and coexistence, i. e. human sympathy and humanity<sup>41</sup>, but also the acquisition of other ethical values and standards of behaviour and the development of communication and social skills<sup>42</sup> create a more general personality basis for confronting the problem of the occurrence and dissemination of mis-information and dis-information. Similarly, another compulsorily optional subject is Catholic Religious Education, the role of which is, inter alia, to „promote the value orientation of pupils so as to benefit their personal and social development“.<sup>43</sup> Religious education helps develop the key competences (learning, problem-solving, communication, social and interpersonal and existential) of pupils.<sup>44</sup> It is also „education for responsibility for one’s own actions, teaches pupils to think critically, not to be manipulated or to be manipulators, to understand one’s own actions and the actions of others in the context of different life situations“.<sup>45</sup> The overall contribution of ethical education as well as religious education can be perceived at the prevention level by forming the human qualities of the subject as a communicator of online information content. It implies a dimension of an awareness of a sense of responsibility and the practice of responsible individual behaviour in the online space in relation to others who may be negatively affected by the dissemination of false content.

In particular, school education creates the prerequisites for effectively combating the phenomenon of dis-information in the context of media education, which is defined as a compulsory cross-curricular topic of the subjects at both levels of education through all the focal objectives. The issue is indirectly implicated in the so-called expected outcomes of media education as a cross-curricular topic, which define the requirements for pupils’ performance according to the level of education. For example, a grammar school student should be able to „create a critical analysis of a selected media case, a report from several sources - domestic and foreign (method of processing, hidden interests in various sources ...)“.<sup>46</sup> At the end of the 9th year he/she should be able to „describe the benefits and risks of the Internet, especially social networks and formulate possibilities, principles of safer use of new technologies;... accept ethical aspects in the use of media - netiquette“ and at the same time „to understand both the positive and negative aspects of freedom of expression (ethics in the media, ‘canards’, paparazzi)“.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>40</sup> *Etická výchova – gymnázium so štvorročným a päťročným vzdelávacím programom*, Vzdelávací štandard. *Inovovaný štátny vzdelávací program*. [online]. [2019-11-30]. Available at: <[https://www.statpedu.sk/files/articles/dokumenty/inovovany-statny-vzdelavaci-program/eticka\\_vychova\\_g\\_4\\_5\\_r.pdf](https://www.statpedu.sk/files/articles/dokumenty/inovovany-statny-vzdelavaci-program/eticka_vychova_g_4_5_r.pdf)>.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> *Etická výchova – nižšie stredné vzdelávanie*. Vzdelávací štandard. *Inovovaný štátny vzdelávací program*. [online]. [2019-11-19]. Available at: <[https://www.statpedu.sk/files/articles/dokumenty/inovovany-statny-vzdelavaci-program/eticka-vychova\\_nsv\\_2014.pdf](https://www.statpedu.sk/files/articles/dokumenty/inovovany-statny-vzdelavaci-program/eticka-vychova_nsv_2014.pdf)>.

<sup>43</sup> *Náboženská výchova/ náboženstvo – Katolícka cirkev – gymnázium so štvorročným vzdelávacím programom*. Vzdelávací štandard. *Inovovaný štátny vzdelávací program*. [online]. [2019-11-30]. Available at: <[https://www.statpedu.sk/files/articles/dokumenty/inovovany-statny-vzdelavaci-program/nabozenska\\_vychova\\_nabozenstvo\\_katolicka\\_cirkev\\_g\\_4\\_5\\_r.pdf](https://www.statpedu.sk/files/articles/dokumenty/inovovany-statny-vzdelavaci-program/nabozenska_vychova_nabozenstvo_katolicka_cirkev_g_4_5_r.pdf)>.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> *Náboženská výchova – náboženstvo – Katolícka cirkev – nižšie stredné vzdelávanie* Vzdelávací štandard. *Inovovaný štátny vzdelávací program*. [online]. [2019-11-19]. Available at: <[https://www.statpedu.sk/files/articles/dokumenty/inovovany-statny-vzdelavaci-program/nabozenska-vychova-katolicka\\_nsv\\_2014.pdf](https://www.statpedu.sk/files/articles/dokumenty/inovovany-statny-vzdelavaci-program/nabozenska-vychova-katolicka_nsv_2014.pdf)>.

<sup>46</sup> BIZIKOVÁ, L.: *Metodické odporúčania k napĺňaniu cieľov prierezovej témy mediálna výchova*. [online]. [2019-11-19]. Available at: <[https://www.statpedu.sk/files/articles/nove\\_dokumenty/ucebnice-metodiky-publikacie/medialna\\_vychova\\_odporucane\\_vystupy.pdf](https://www.statpedu.sk/files/articles/nove_dokumenty/ucebnice-metodiky-publikacie/medialna_vychova_odporucane_vystupy.pdf)>.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

The latter outcome implies dis-information, but in the context of print media. Therefore, an educational theme typical of social media is a current challenge for media education in the context of school education - or possibly teaching within other educational areas.

At the same time, it is clear that compulsory school education in Slovakia creates up-to-date conditions for the formation of pupils in the given area by supporting their interest in learning about social phenomena, abstract logical thinking and critical thinking, especially in the context of work with information sources, development of democratic civic awareness, respect for human rights and values, etc. For example, the national educational programmes define the following general educational objectives for grammar schools, i. e. those that pupils should learn in the course of complete secondary general education:

- „To deepen students' abstract and logical thinking with an emphasis on understanding the causal, functional and developmental relationships between phenomena and processes;
- To teach students to solve problems, tasks, to conduct research and to draw logical conclusions;
- To encourage students to think critically, using a multilateral approach to addressing tasks;
- To teach students to place the acquired information / knowledge in a meaningful context of life practice;
- To strengthen students' approach to respecting human rights and responsible participation in a democratic society;
- To motivate pupils to be interested in the world and the people around them, to be active in protecting human and cultural values...;
- To encourage students to become aware of the global interdependence of events, developments and problems at local, regional, national and global levels“.<sup>48</sup>

## 4. Conclusion

The educational topic of mis-information and dis-information can be identified in its partial aspects within all the educational areas or cross-curricular subjects examined. „Media and information literacy research should respond to the fundamental changes in education and the ever-expanding range of educational options beyond its traditional forms and limits“.<sup>49</sup> However, it is absent in the form of a coherent thematic unit in the current compulsory educational programmes for lower and upper secondary education. This is primarily due to the novelty of the phenomenon to which the educational programmes innovated in 2014 and 2015 are not yet responding. In its implicit form, however, it is possible to identify the topic at both levels of education more significantly in the subjects of Slovak language, Informatics, Civics, History and the cross-curricular topic of media education (Research Question 1), in particular as part of the required development of students' ability to differentiate and assess the truth of information sources, especially media sources, and in the context of learning topics related to increasing personal cultivation, responsible civic and historical awareness and sensitivity to the issue of accepting human rights. As we believe, in addition to the aforementioned, the subjects of Ethical Education and Religious Education also bring important incentives in this regard. The content of

<sup>48</sup> Štátne vzdelávacie programy pre gymnáziá. (Úplné stredné všeobecné vzdelávanie). [online]. [2019-05-09]. Available at: <[http://www.statpedu.sk/files/articles/dokumenty/inovovany-statny-vzdelavaci-program/statny\\_vzdel\\_program\\_pre\\_gymnazia.pdf](http://www.statpedu.sk/files/articles/dokumenty/inovovany-statny-vzdelavaci-program/statny_vzdel_program_pre_gymnazia.pdf)>.

<sup>49</sup> AROLDI, P., MARIÑO, M. V., VRABEC, N.: Evaluation and funding of media and information literacy. In FRAU-MEIGS, D., VELEZ, I., MICHEL, J. F. (eds.): *Public policies in media and information literacy in Europe: cross-country comparisons*. Abingdon : Routledge, 2017, p. 216.



education thus covers the focal qualities of media and information literacy, or media education and journalistic alphabetization models, in the intersection with the topic of mis-information and dis-information (Research Question 2).

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Martín Ponti

# The Politics Of Melodrama: The Serialization Of Populism In Kirchner's Presidency

## ABSTRACT

As part of a diplomatic tour to the United States in 2012, now ex-president of Argentina Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, gave a series of speeches at various institutions of higher learning. The Argentinean press covering the President's visits coded their analysis following a melodramatic code reminiscent of popular serialized programming known in Latin America as *telenovelas* (Soap operas in the Anglo-American media context). Conservative and right leaning media outlets used the telenovela formula to construct Kirchner as a villain, due to her promotion of a populist participatory democracy in opposition to neoliberal economic policies. Journalists followed the Kirchner tour closely, and each of her visits were framed as episodes full of the genre's markers with clearly delineated cliff-hangers, explosive revelations, and competing dichotomous characters. In order to understand the uses of melodramatic paradigm, I am proposing a close reading of the staging, performance and the speeches Kirchner held at Harvard University. I argue in this article that Kirchner employs the code of melodrama to speak to her constituents, but it is also her adversaries which frame a condemnation of the President using similarly structured telenovela paradigm. I am interested in addressing how the telenovela/melodramatic code is appropriated by both opposing political sides and the implications this has on the television genre as a purveyor of political discourse.

## KEY WORDS

Populism. Political Discourse. Peronism. Cristina Fernández de Kirchner.



# 1. Introduction

On December 10, 2007 Cristina Fernández de Kirchner became the first democratically elected female president in Argentina. In her first election she won with 45% of the electorate and in her subsequent re-election in 2011, Cristina Fernández won with a higher electoral margin, winning a total of 54% of the votes.<sup>1</sup> Since the return of democracy in 1983, no other woman has held so many varied and influential political positions. She has served as Senator for the province of Buenos Aires, as well as for Santa Cruz. She was an elected member within the Chamber of Deputies for Santa Cruz, as well as for Río Gallegos, and held the position of First Lady under her husband Ernesto Kirchner's presidency (2003-2007). Most recently she became Vice-President, after the 2019 election of incumbent President Alberto Fernandez.

The mere mention of Cristina Fernández de Kirchner's name in Argentina, from now on referred to as CFK, generates a polarizing effect fueling passionate opinions from both followers and detractors. Kirchnerist's, or CFK followers, popularly referred to as K's, quickly enumerate the party's achievements during her tenure. Some key projects and legislation include the expansion of the welfare state in the form of a Universal Child Allowance<sup>2</sup>, which extends monetary and medical benefits to children of families who are (under)(un)employed, or whose salary falls below the national minimum wage.<sup>3</sup> Another initiative by CFK's party includes *Connecting Equality*, aimed at transforming education by focusing on developing student's digital literacy. To this end, the program distributed 3 million laptop computers, within a three-year period to public school students. The focus of the program aimed at closing the unequal gap in areas of access to technology and digital literacy among public school students, in comparison to their private school counterparts. Another central piece of legislation includes the passage of marriage equality, a first in a Latin American Nation. Through the work of grass roots organizations, CFK's party sponsored the law which led to an uninterrupted 15-hour debate in the Senate. The law passed on July 2010.<sup>4</sup>

The enacted programs and legislations align with the party's ideology, defining the role of the state as a safety net meant to improve and safeguard the lives of its citizens. In part, many of these programs were enacted to counteract neoliberal policies, known in the region as the *Washington Consensus*, carried out by the political establishment throughout the 1990s. This period was named the *Década perdida*, the *Lost Decade*. The Decade sought to modernize Argentina and allow it to participate within the globalized economy through its adoption of neoliberal recommendations, such as greater fiscal discipline, trade liberalization, and the redirection of public expenditure. Argentina's strict adherence to the model awarded the nation international praise. The International Monetary Fund deemed Argentina the star *pupil* who prescriptively followed the model. As the role of the state retreated in favor of a free market economy within a peripheral nation, it created the perfect storm for economic, social, and political collapse. In November of 2001 international investors began to withdraw their deposits

<sup>1</sup> GAUDÍN, A.: *Argentine President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner Begins Second Term with Flurry of Activity*. [online]. [2020-02-10]. Available at: <<https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/notisur/14022>>.

<sup>2</sup> For more information regarding the Universal Allowance see: GROISMAN, F. et. al.: Políticas de Protección Social y Participación Económica de la Población en Argentina (2003-2010). In *Desarrollo Económico*, 2011, Vol. 51, No. 202/203, p. 241-262. ISSN 0046001X. [online]. [2020-02-10]. Available at: <[www.jstor.org/stable/23612383](http://www.jstor.org/stable/23612383)>.

<sup>3</sup> ROCA, E.: Asignación Universal por Hijo (AUH): Extensión de las asignaciones familiares. In *Revista Debate Público*, 2011, Vol. 1, No. 1, p. 33-34. [online]. [2020-02-05]. Available at: <<http://trabajosocial.sociales.uba.ar/revista-debate-publico-no1/>>.

<sup>4</sup> COOPER, M.: The Argentinean Movement for Same-Sex Marriage. In PULLEN, C. (ed.): *LGBT Transnational Identity and the Media*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, p. 102-113. [online]. [2019-05-28]. Available at: <[https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1057%2F9780230373310\\_7](https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1057%2F9780230373310_7)>. For more information on marriage equality in Argentina see: SCHULENBER, S.: The Construction and Enactment of Same-Sex Marriage in Argentina. In *Journal of Human Rights*, 2012, Vol. 11, No. 1, p. 106-125. ISSN 1364-2987. [online]. [2019-06-06]. Available at: <<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/14754835.2012.648153>>.

ultimately leading to the collapse of the banking system resulting in the largest debt default totaling more than US\$155 billion.<sup>5</sup> Overnight, people lost their savings as banks closed. Due to limited space and scope of this research I am simplifying the events and causes that led to the greatest economic crisis faced in Argentina. However, part of this context is relevant to the research at hand, since these events created the scenario in which the Kirchners' acquired a central role in Argentinean politics. I return to this key point in the discussion section. Having provided a brief overview of Kirchnerist policy and ideology in relation to the changes that took place in Argentina since 1990, this introduction now shifts to providing the narrative of the opposition which provides a different read of the events taking place throughout the 12 years of Kirchnerism.

Kirchnerist opposition<sup>6</sup> established a clearly defined narrative reinterpreting the combined presidencies of Ernesto and CFK. The opposing political rhetoric focuses on a three-tiered axes, yet all sharing the same point: Kirchnerist policies have undermined the independence of the three branches of government endangering representative republicanism. A common repeated slogan by the opposition stated Argentina was on track to becoming the next Cuba and Venezuela. For example, in the case of Universal Child Allowance, the opposition claimed that while the objective of the program helped a wide segment of society, there were multiple similar plans that were not consulted. Thus, the Universal Allowance passed by decree and not by a greater consensus. The second related element relates to Kirchnerist economic policies that reject neoliberal free market economies in favor of the development of internal markets. Those in opposition claim that an insular economy shields the nation from global interconnections, facilitating the party's disproportionate control over the region's economies. Lastly, and perhaps the one most relevant to this research relates to CFK's communicational style. Critics point out that while she may not be a dictator, the president's inability to communicate openly with the press, shifts the limits further into a state of authoritarianism. Certain members of the press claim the president only speaks to those journalists that profess K sympathies.

A common element found among official K narratives as well as from the opposition rests in the ability to both conjure strong emotions. For Kirchnerist sympathizers CFK's legacy provokes a sense of pride but also strong passion, love and devotion. Followers feel vindicated and protected ready to confront the growing inequalities as a result of globalized free market economies. On the other hand, those opposed to Kirchnerist policies feel CFK's projects were mere fronts to illicitly enrich those loyal to the party. Rather than seeing international markets and global capitalism as an external threats, the opposition sees Argentina's supposed retraction from global markets as a sign of economic, political and socio-cultural isolation that threatens the republic. Thus, K detractors position themselves as indefatigable defenders of liberty and democracy. Furthermore, both narratives expose a highly melodramatic discourse, each one appropriating the narrative mode to their respective needs.

## 1.1 Research Questions and Objectives

As I argue in this research, melodrama functions as a discursive strategy to inform political discourse. In order to expose the innerworkings of melodrama in politics I employ the strategies of discourse analysis and carry out closed readings of political speeches to understand the role of melodrama in configuring CFK's political thought. As a cultural form, melodrama operates

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<sup>5</sup> MUNCK, R.: International Journal of Political Economy. In *International Journal of Political Economy*, 2001, Vol. 31, No. 3, p. 68.

<sup>6</sup> For more in depth information regarding opposing parties and their relationship to media see: BOTERO, S. et al.: Under Friendly Fire: An Experiment in partisan Press, Fragmented Opposition and Voting Behavior. In *Electoral Studies*, 2019, Vol. 60, p. 100-121. ISSN 0261-3794. [online]. [2019-06-06]. Available at: <10.1016/j.electstud.2019.04.008>.



as a malleable genre able to adapt to multiple cultural products including film, television, music and literature. At the same time, melodrama also has the potential to inform and operate in other areas, such as in structuring political rhetoric. The archive of my research thus centres on former president of Argentina Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner's diplomatic tour of the United States in 2012 and her public address at Harvard University in the John F. Kennedy's Forum of International Politics. I am interested in analyzing CFK's public address on September 27<sup>th</sup> of 2012, as a way of understanding the event as a public performance designed to stage Kirchnerist ideology grounded in populist rhetoric and poised against tenants of free market economies. In part, this research questions and interprets populism not as a carrier of a specific ideological and political thought, but simply as a way to communicate ideology. In tandem to populism, melodrama also plays a role in facilitating, in serving as a strategy to communicate political ideology. Thus, this article articulates CFK's political discourse as the confluence of melodrama and populism. In my analysis populist rhetoric relies heavily on melodramatic forms to construct and shape its narrative made comprehensible to its political subjects. To be clear, melodrama does not dictate populist policies, nor does it establish a fixed definition of what constitutes populism. Instead melodrama serves as a communicative strategy. Telenovelas as an industrial and cultural product that embodies Latin America's form of melodrama follows a strict aesthetic and thematic code. This code allows for its reproduction and dissemination, but what has become increasingly noticeable within the last few years, is the influence of the telenovela code in structuring other genres, other forms of cultural production. It is throughout the presidency of Cristina Fernández de Kirchner where we begin to see telenovela codes coming from the president's own political party but as well from as the economic elite that organized in opposition to Kirchner. As Kirchner's political capital grew, so did societies polarizations. However, this polarization, in terms of media representations has gone beyond confronting opposing political ideologies such as the left vs. the right. Instead it has become much more primal, invoking an excess of emotion, reminiscent of a melodramatic code that filters all experiences through an emotional lens.

## 2. Conceptualizing Melodrama and Populism in Latin America

### 2.1 The case of Melodrama

The influence and centrality of the melodramatic formula informing political discourse has at times stood at odds due to a perceived incompatibility of forms. For the most part, melodrama has been a mode of representation linked solely to the cultural industries. As such there are multiple studies theorizing the reach of melodrama as a purveyor of mass culture. Film and television studies across linguistic, national, cultural boundaries have documented the genre's ability to codify conceptions of pleasure, domesticity, and gender roles.<sup>7</sup> In contrast, political discourse and political practices, while influenced by mass culture, see itself within a separate sphere. In the monograph *Orgies of Freedom*<sup>8</sup> Elizabeth Anker provides an incisive account

<sup>7</sup> For the study of melodrama across various fields and linguistic research see: BARBERO, J.: *Communication, Culture, and Hegemony: From the Media to Mediations*. London, Newbury Park : Sage Publications, 1993. BROOKS, P.: *The Melodramatic Imagination*. New Haven, London : Yale University Press, 1996. LANDY, M. et al: *Imitations of Life: A Reader on Film and Television Melodrama*. Detroit, Michigan : Wayne State University Press, 1992. MAZZIOTTI, N.: *La Industria de la Telenovela: La Producción de Ficción en América Latina*. Buenos Aires, Argentina : Paidós, 1996. SADLER, D.: *Latin American melodrama : passion, pathos, and entertainment*. Urbana, Illinois : University of Illinois Press, 2009.

<sup>8</sup> ANKER, E.: *Orgies of Feeling: Melodrama and the Politics of Freedom*. Durham : Duke University Press, 2014, p. 10-11.

which topples the wall separating both melodrama and politics and reveals how the former shapes political discourse as a means to galvanize the public's perception of events. Within this perspective, Anker begins positioning the attacks on 9/11 and the subsequent military response by the United States as a key moment where melodrama and politics collide. The political narrative surrounding the use of force by the US, closely mirrors the ethos of melodrama as it creates a „spectacle of destruction“ perpetrated by a set of dangerous terrorists and therefore situates Americans as the victims who must defend the „spectacle of destruction“. <sup>9</sup> In other words, the state's military response codes the use of force not as a destructive retaliation, but rather as a necessary retribution speaking to virtue. <sup>10</sup> Thus, the United States' justification for use of power/violence rests on its moral imperative to maintain the binary *good* and *evil*. The concept of the hero here functions as a metaphor of the nation and its citizenry.

As Anker states „*Orgies of Feeling investigates the history, political strategies, and affective pulls of melodramatic political discourses*“ <sup>11</sup> within the limits of the US context. While my research focuses broadly on Latin America, and specifically Argentina, still Anker's text validates melodrama as a discursive strategy employed by a political apparatus to legitimize and communicate its goals, be it expansion, military operations, economic models, etc. To do so it employs the genre's formula which includes a virtuous hero who is tested and victimized by an outside threat, but ultimately regains its strength and triumphs over adversity. Similarly, CFK's populist discourse also pinpoints a key moment to galvanize strong opinions and situate her restitutive political project. The moment is the economic and social effects set in motion by the largest default and economic collapse in Argentinean history in 2001. While it was the downfall of the country, Kirchner's discourse employs the downfall as also the resurgence of a cultural and social change that Kirchnerism will sustain. According to this narrative the Kirchner presidencies restored the possibilities for women and all those deemed marginalized by economic and social policies to once again have a voice. Global capitalism is thus centred as the culprit and Kirchnerism as the formula to restore social justice and order.

Within a Latin American context, the pairing of politics and melodrama has produced various studies and monographs on the subject however, as opposed to the work of Anker, Latin American scholars have taken on a cultural studies methodology that favors a shift to cultural production as a way of understanding the significance of the texts. One of the earlier texts that paired melodrama and politics include Doris Sommer's *Foundational fictions*. <sup>12</sup> Sommer's work provides a groundbreaking study that establishes the connection between romantic literature of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the political nation building process that began during the post-colonial era in Latin America. This text lays the foundation to understanding the role of cultural production, specifically literature as a political strategy to spread liberal ideas in Latin American nations after the wars of independence. Sommer's work parts from Benedict Anderson's notion of *Imagined Communities* <sup>13</sup> which postulates the notion that mass print literature fueled a sense of national community in readers since the texts shared a common language, a shared sense of history, and created a national market of cultural goods. Sommer utilizes Anderson's theory and applies it to the romantic literature by Creole writers who legitimized their position as national leaders by creating highly melodramatic texts about star crossed lovers who served as metaphors for the author's nation building projects. As Sommer relates, it is no coincidence that the literary canon of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Latin America included authors with key positions

<sup>9</sup> ANKER, E.: *Orgies of Feeling: Melodrama and the Politics of Freedom*. Durham : Duke University Press, 2014, p. 1.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>12</sup> For a detailed study of 19<sup>th</sup> century romantic literature in Latin American nation building project see: SOMMER, D.: *Foundational Fictions: The National Romances of Latin America*. Berkeley : University of California Press, 2007.

<sup>13</sup> ANDERSON, B.: *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. New York : Verso, 2016.

in governments and in politics. Many of the authors included in Sommer's studies became presidents of their respective nations. Thus my work in this research is informed by the reach of melodrama as a cultural form with the capacity to shape and communicate grand narratives that can be understood and followed by large segments of society.

## 2.2 The case of Populism

A challenge that arises when researching and writing about populism includes the myriad of academic and non-academic literature that compete for establishing a stable definition. In most media representations and in even some academic literature, the term is used as a marker, as code that stands in for something negative. It is used to explain its effects on underdevelopment in Latin America, as a challenge to liberal democracies and it has even been used to describe its ability to introduce political clientelism. The literature treats the term *populism*, and *populist* as an all-encompassing blanket term deemed to define policies and leaders that put into question liberal democracies. Part of the problem rests in these representations inability to distinguish not only the political differences and nuances, but the socio-cultural, linguistic, and historical contexts that inform the specificity of its deployment and site of enunciation. A clear example includes the lumping together of various political leaders without distinguishing their disparate and often contradictory political ideologies, but nonetheless included in the same category. Case in point, Bolivia's former President Evo Morales, a left leaning social democrat who advocates for the rights of the marginalized indigenous population receive the title of *populist*, in the same way as the conservative right winged white nationalist Donald Trump, in the United States.<sup>14</sup> These two leaders could not be more different, yet media and academic literature employ the terminology without providing context.

In more nuanced studies that complicate and provide a broader conceptualization of populism, includes the work developed by Ernesto Laclau.<sup>15</sup> In *Hegemonía y estrategia socialista*, Laclau exemplifies that for meaning to be extracted from political discourse it must be relational and able to build on prefigured practices and contexts as a way to avoid an essentialist understanding of the term. For Laclau, populism presupposes that marginalized subjects raise their voice in order to question their subordinate position in society, however in this framing, there must be a clear antagonist that stands in the way of those attempting to escape marginalization. It is for this reason that I argue that melodrama and populism are closely linked since they both rely on narrative strategies of opposition and struggles. It is important to insist, as does Laclau, that populism does not necessary contain a specific ideology, but rather it is a tool that constructs a political space organized around equivalent subjects and negates those that stand against it. Other frameworks that have defined populism, shifts from Laclau's political identity formation vis a vis an adversary, to what some have identified as a *pacto populista*<sup>16</sup> or a populist pact. Rajland considers the populist pact on the socio-economic matrix employed by nations that lie on the periphery of global capitalism. In other words, for Rajland, populism is more of a tool that allows the state to set in place mechanisms that stabilize and harmonize inequalities between the subaltern and the dominant classes. This combination of

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<sup>14</sup> Academic literature has established differences but there are still scholars that while they do not categorize as all populist leaders as having the same political ideologies, they do find how they employ similar strategies. See: DE LA TORRE, C.: Trump's populism: Lessons from Latin America. In *Postcolonial Studies*, 2017, Vol. 20, No. 2, p. 187-198. ISSN 1466-1888. [online]. [2020-01-15]. Available at: <<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13688790.2017.1363846?scroll=top&needAccess=>>>.

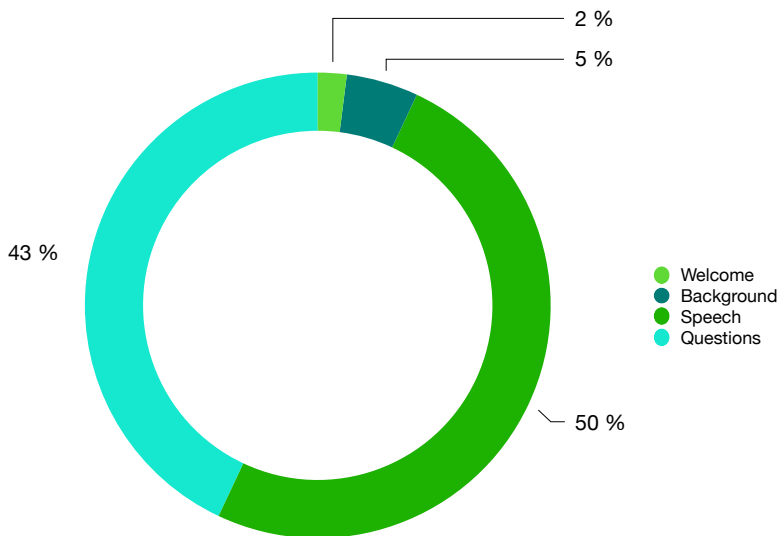
<sup>15</sup> For an in-depth study of populism in Latin America see the following: LACLAU, E. et al.: *Hegemonía y estrategia socialista: Hacia una radicalización de la democracia*. Madrid : Siglo XXI de España, 2018.

<sup>16</sup> Beatriz Rajland has employed the term *populist act* to explain the innerworkings of populism. See: RAJLAND, B.: *El Pacto Populista en la Argentina: Proyección teórico-política hacia la actualidad*. Buenos Aires : Ediciones CCC, 2012.

shared antagonisms against an enemy and the need to stabilize peripheral post-colonial nation into a broader global economy is part of the blueprint for Kirchner’s populism. Kirchnerism as a populist political ideology attempts to provide answers to the social displacement and the retreating role of the state that has played during the worst economic collapse in the history of the country during December of 2001, and thus makes possible the configuration of two opposing groups. There needs to be a process of identification that organizes and moves groups that have been historically displaced because of racial, class, or political and economic turmoil that might have excluded subjects from full participation. Within the populist Kirchnerist party it incorporated a wide segment of social actors and identities including: the LGBTQI community, university scholars and intellectuals from the left, the scientific community, and those perceived as working class, all mobilized against the traditional elite and those identities deemed functional to the right, such as certain sectors of the Catholic church, the military and the economic elite.

### 3. Findings

On September 28, 2012 the John F. Kennedy Jr. Forum at the Institute of Politics at Harvard University hosted then President of Argentina Cristina Fernández de Kirchner. The event included mostly an audience of students, faculty and several diplomats including the Ambassador of Argentina. I categorize the event, a performance of melodramatic diplomatic populism in its attempt to showcase the reach of argentine populism as an alternative to US neoliberal and free market policies. CFK’s overall message is to provide a corrective definition of populism, as it is a highly contested term. The performance lasted one hour and forty minutes and the chart below organizes the categories making up the presidential speech with the percent of time devoted to each category.



**FIGURE 1:** The pie-chart provides the percentage of time CFK dedicated to each topic throughout her talk

Source: own processing, 2020

**Categories:**

1. Welcome and Ground Rules by Dean Ellwood: 2 minutes
2. Invited Speaker’s Background: 5:00 minutes
3. Plenary Speech: 50 minutes
4. Question and Answer Period: 43 minutes

From the onset, it might seem irrelevant to delineate and measure the amount of time devoted to each section, since the order and progression of the whole gathering falls in-line with most invited plenary talks. As one can see from the categories, there is nothing characteristically different. The Dean thanks the guests, provides a brief introduction to the speaker, etc. However as discussed in the next section, it is important to highlight the percent of time spent on each section, particularly the plenary talk and the open question and answer period. The discussion below interprets the last two categories of the talk as the site where melodrama and populism merge in order to make intelligible the political communicative act established by CFK's performance.

## 4. Discussion

The following discussion is organized following the four main categories identified in the Findings section.

### 4.1 Welcome and Ground-Rules

The moderator of the plenary talk opened the forum to general acknowledgements to faculty, students, and dignitaries. Dean Ellwood quickly turned to discuss the ground rules, and while it took up only 2% of the time, in relation to the rest of the talk, the rules clearly set the tone for what would be a contentious conversation among CFK and the students. He opens this part of the talk to remind everyone of the importance of „*freedom of speech*“ and the value that the John F. Kennedy Institute places on „*open and civil discourse*“ and how these values have made the Institute a premiere site for informed debate. Ellwood continues to stress the two basic ground rules which include allowing the speaker to get through their talk and then allowing the audience to ask „*unfiltered questions*“. For Argentine audiences, the ground rules stated by Ellwood acquire greater significance based on the viewer's political standing, thus having the capacity to resignify the importance of those rules. As mentioned in the introduction, the opposition has established a narrative with highly melodramatic tones that situate CFK as an autocrat who vilifies and discredits the role of the press. And for those who follow CFK, they see this moment as an example of the president's participation in open forums that encourage open debate.

The anti-press narrative created by the opposition became widely diffused about the time the legislative branch began discussing the ruling party's support of the Audio Visual and Communications Law. This law passed by a majority in both legislative houses in Argentina on October 10, 2009, and was signed into law by CFK. Part of the law promoted the repeal of the former communications law promulgated during the last military dictatorship, which favored and helped solidify media conglomerates such as Grupo Clarín, in return for propaganda supporting the military coup. Through its participation and collaboration with the state, Grupo Clarín now comprises the largest media oligopoly in Argentina. Among various amendments, the new law sought to diversify offerings and ownership by restricting broadcast licenses for ten years. License renewals would depend on a series of requirements such as 60% of its programs must be national productions and 30% of programming slated for local educational and informative/news. Thus for the opposition organized around the concentration of media and economic control framed the law as an issue of limiting freedom of press, and of silencing dissident voices, rather than the ruling party's attempt to regulate and diversify the market by curtailing oligopolies. Under the Questions and Answer section, this issue will be addressed further, however it remains clear that the issues of „*freedom of press*“ and „*open and civil discourse*“ is not only part of the ground rules, but the main issue at stake throughout the talk, as well as the question and answer period.

## 4.2 Background

Part of the Dean's presentation follows the conventions regarding introducing a speaker since he briefly describes CFK's achievements as President, but also outlines some criticism in an effort to provide a balanced picture of the speaker. However the element of the presentation that stands out the most concerns the rhetorical framing of Argentina as a prosperous and developed nation. The elements focused on by the speaker reveals the site of enunciation from which the narrative emerges. The United States as one of the strongest economies of the world, operates as an empire with its political and economic reach, extending far beyond its borders, historically perpetuating a neocolonial relationship with Latin America. Thus, Argentina's national profile presented by the Dean focuses mostly on the potential economic viability Argentina holds for the United States. Therefore the nation is defined by its economic value as reflected in the following lines, „*Argentina is a nation of vast national resources, well-educated and sophisticated population with a globally and competitive agricultural sector and a diversified industrial base, rather than by its socio-cultural and historic legacy.*“<sup>17</sup> Any socio-cultural and historical importance remains secondary as there is no extractable value. „*It has a vibrant culture and a rich history. The varied and diverse backgrounds of the argentine people is reflected in the nation's grand architecture. Fine cuisine and positive outlook.*“<sup>18</sup> As these last quotes reveal a much more generic message applicable to any nation, whereas the first lines include more concrete facts, as a testament to what is valued by the United States.

The introductory background continues with a shift from a brief detail of Argentina to presenting a political and biography of CFK. Once again the opening biographical lines structure and frame CFK as a leader following a melodramatic and serialized tone. By serialized I am making a reference to the melodramatic form that is relevant to Latin America, which is the telenovela. Such melodramatic programing as described previously, structure its narrative following an ethos of passion as the element that makes serialized narratives intelligible to audiences. Telenovelas do not value facts and deep and well developed characters, but rather favor characters who make sense of the world through the power of their emotions and passions. Ellwood similarly utilizes the language of passion to define CFK, and thus demarcate the ways in which the plenary talk will play out for the audience. Ellwood states, „*What is clear is that this president fights passionately for the policies and people that she champions. It should come as no surprise that she has consistently placed high on the Forbes's list of 100 most powerful women in the world.*“<sup>19</sup> Added to the emotional charge includes yet another element of serialized melodrama including the sense of battle and the moral imperative to fight for those in need. The introduction proceeds, „*It [Argentina] also has a tradition of strong female leaders. Evita Perón was the first female president. Our guest is the second, but she is the first woman elected president of Argentina.*“<sup>20</sup> While his facts are incorrect, Evita never became President and only held the position of First Lady, the speaker establishes the trajectory and links that connect CFK to a Peronist genealogy of powerful female leaders. In the invocation of a female political worldview reinforces melodramatic elements, since historically melodrama has been viewed as a female genre. The section concludes with a series of CFK policies and projects that have been recognized internationally in terms of successful economic and social policies such as economic growth sustained at 8- 9% per year and the creation of the Ministry of Science and Technology. This new Ministry helped to repatriate Argentine scientist who due to economic hardship and lack of funding had to go abroad to continue their research.

<sup>17</sup> *Cristina Fernández de Kirchner's Public Address (Full Video)*. [Online] [2019-12-05]. Available at: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N9LY4qhXEXs&t=1224s>>.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.



### 4.3 Plenary Speech

CFK's talk at Harvard reiterates the theme and structure of her plenary speech at the United Nations the previous night. In both talks CFK espouses on what she titles and defines as a „*new civilizing era*.“ By this term CFK extends a solution to the global economic crisis that has affected not only emerging nations, but the central economic powers of the world. She explains that since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the leading economic and socio-political nations of the world have conceptualized solutions that reproduce western thought influenced only by the Greco-Roman world. Even nations with competing and multiple world views have turned to the West as a response to their crisis. She cites the case of Latin American and their search for independence from Spain. The elite in those regions turned to European concepts emerging from the French Enlightenment in order to not only become independent but trace and configure the ways their new nations would be established. CFK interprets this act as a mistake since liberating a region employing the same ideals that led to those colonial relationships cannot render success. The illustrative example is one of many provided by CFK which highlights the „*vicious repetitive cycles*“ that have constantly looked inwards and to the West for answers. Thus for CFK the civilizing era is a stand-in for the concept of progress, a progress which must turn to the developing world and the Global South for answers to issues such as terrorism, the concentration of wealth in the top 1% of the world, the breakdown of a plural participatory democracy, and speculative financial economy over production and innovation.

For Latin Americanist CFK's deployment of „*civilizing era*“ is extremely reminiscent of Domingo Faustino Sarmiento's conception of „*civilization versus barbarism*.“<sup>21</sup> Sarmiento was a writer, statesman, and was a member of the Generation of 1837, who highly influenced the region's conception of culture and national life. Sarmiento's work develops one of the most influential metaphors that would define part of the political and intellectual landscape of 19<sup>th</sup> century Latin America. In his text, Sarmiento establishes the binary civilization vs barbarism as a means to model development in Argentina. Civilization for Sarmiento represented the values of Western Europe, placing a heavy emphasis in the work ethic of the West and the civil and political institutions, as the backbone for freedom and progress. Whereas barbarism, represented the autochthonous cultures and traditions of Argentina and Latin America. This binary set up by Sarmiento and resignified by CFK extends the melodramatic element of diametrically opposed views who must confront and battle each other. It is presented as a moral imperative following the melodramatic logic of serialized narratives.

CFK's resignification of the term enacts a reconfiguration of that which is considered «civilizing». Whereas Sarmiento saw Western culture and institutions as the backbone of civilization and that which will uplift non-western societies, CFK's „*civilizing era*“ proposes distancing from the West in order to incorporate the plurality of voices that have been silenced and marginalized. As she states: „*There is a contradiction between developed countries and emerging countries. The emerging countries, we have precisely been the ones who have sustained worldwide economic activity, as well as the growth of the world's economy during the last decade. The economies of developed countries grew very little and it is precisely the emerging countries who have sustained such growth.*“<sup>22</sup>

Throughout the speech, CFK does not read from a teleprompter or notes, but rather projects as if it were an impromptu talk. Due to her style one can see elements of an unscripted conference such as the circular statements «emerging/developing countries» that repeat throughout her talk as if she is organizing her thoughts as she speaks. The repetitive nature of her discourse

<sup>21</sup> Sarmiento's conceptualization of civilization vs. barbarism is developed in his foundational text: SARMIENTO, D.: *Facundo, Civilización y barbarie: Vida de Juan Facundo Quiroga*. Mexico : Editorial Porrúa, 1966.

<sup>22</sup> *Cristina Fernández de Kirchner's Public Address (Full Video)*. [Online] [2019-12-05]. Available at: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N9LY4qhXEXs&t=1224s>>.

also corresponds to the melodramatic formula, since serialized narratives tend to be circular in nature, always referring back to previous moments. As mentioned previously also melodrama favors the emotions and the focus on personal narratives over any other discursive style. In CFK's speech this personal element makes itself present in her use of the first person plural, to refer to emerging countries. CFK inserts herself in the position of an emerging country that has had to respond to the crisis created by developed nations. Furthermore the continuous repetition of the emerging and developed countries reinforces a dichotomous binary which melodrama always establishes to categorize that which is *right* and *wrong* or *good* an *evil*. In Latin American telenovelas one of the recurring plots include storylines that categorize characters as either rich or poor and the social struggles that exist among both groups. Generally the poor are represented as hard-working, honest, and willing to sacrifice themselves for the good of others. While the rich are generally portrayed as manipulative, shallow, and stand as obstacles the main character's happiness. Clearly CFK follows the paradigm and situates developed nations as the ones who create situations that make it difficult for others emerging nations to « succeed ». CFK adds, Precisely we, the emerging countries, are the ones who can once again reactivate the economy for one simple reason, we have a very low level of debt in relation to our GDP.<sup>23</sup>

#### 4.4 Questions and Answers Period

The more illuminating part of the plenary talk belongs to the questions and answer period which occupied almost the same amount of time as the talk. For the interest of my research, the student's participation and CFK responds further aligned with the melodramatic paradigm. As part of the replies there were plenty of cheers and jeers as well as applause, nervousness and ironic replies. At the beginning of the talk the Dean referred to the Forum as one of the premiere sites for intellectual debate and as such, the presenters have the opportunity to speak and then have to take probing questions. It is important to point out that out of the total of ten questions asked, only three were related to CFK's talk. In the three related questions, students followed up on her main thesis regarding the civilizing era where emerging nations must take a more central role in the economic and political decisions of the world. Students asked about the role of countries such as Paraguay and what role they play in the economies of the region. Also students asked about the upcoming US elections and its possible effects in the region and lastly what roles should G-20 countries play in relation to social responsibility.<sup>24</sup> The remaining seven questions have no relations to the talk, but rather replicate many of the headlines and talking points articulated by journalists with a clear opposition to CFK. One finds a common denominator among the questions which attempts to frame the speaker as an authoritarian leader whose goal is to perpetuate herself in power. Questions such as:

*„Many people in your government or in Congress have been talking about the possibility of a constitutional reform that would allow for your reelection. There were large protests in Buenos Aires and in the country in opposition to this possibility, according to my understanding. Yet you have not responded. Do you want to be re-elected and do you want to reform the Constitution?“<sup>25</sup>*

<sup>23</sup> Cristina Fernández de Kirchner's Public Address (Full Video). [Online] [2019-12-05]. Available at: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N9LY4qhXEXs&t=1224s>>.

<sup>24</sup> I have translated the flowing three questions: This is a very important year for our US friends, because it is an electoral year. How do you think the result can impact our country? How do you now see the bilateral relationships between Argentina and Paraguay and in their future role in the Mercosur? Being part of the G-20, and having conversations with other leaders, what is the position in regards to the importance of social responsibility in the long term, not only regarding Argentina but in the whole world.

<sup>25</sup> Cristina Fernández de Kirchner's Public Address (Full Video). [Online] [2019-12-05]. Available at: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N9LY4qhXEXs&t=1224s>>.

„In light of the constant attacks to media, intellectuals and specific journalists, not necessarily opposing ones but simply critical ones, that have taken place during your government, do you think there is a plurality and freedom of expression in Argentina?“<sup>26</sup>

These two questions directly reference the possibility of a constitutional reform that would serve to undermine democracy in the country, coupled to a sense of censorship or possible retributions against dissident voices. In the local Argentine press the framing of the silencing of journalists began, as mentioned previously, during the proposal to pass the new Audiovisual and Communications Law that would break up Clarín's monopoly, currently the largest media conglomerate in Argentina. While the law was passed in 2009, and currently in 2020 the law has still not been applied, speaks in hindsight to the weakness of the question posed at the time of the talk. The same journalists and media oligopolies continue to operate in Argentina, making the goal of the law which sought to diversify media outlets unable to materialize.

In order to exemplify the way media messages reach citizens, I turn to a highly publicized episode taking place in one of Clarín's television shows. I illustrate this point with a segment of the show PPT, known by its Spanish language acronym meaning *Journalism for Everyone*. PPT crosses the boundaries between news and entertainment, public affairs and pop culture in the likes of shows like Comedy Central's *The Daily Show*. Jorge Lanata, the show's creator and host, has a long trajectory in investigative journalism, and in 1987 he founded the progressive leftist newspaper still in circulation, *Página 12*. Lanata's return to television marked a dramatic shift in his ideological standing considering that he was hired by Grupo-Clarín, a network known for its hardline conservative right-wing views. After an analysis of PPT, it is evident that the show was created to generate opposition to the political, social, and cultural transformation initiated by Kirchner's party. The show's formula borrows directly from US formats, such as the Daily Show and the Colbert Report. The structure and objective of shows like the Daily Show create the possibility of critically questioning power through comedy, satire, and parody, targeting the tenants of truth and objectivity that have formed part of traditional broadcast journalism. This combination results in dissident political messages that blur the distinctions between news and entertainment, but that nonetheless facilitates audiences questioning of key political and social issues. However, PPT simply borrows the structure without reproducing the intended aim of questioning the role of corporate journalism.

The show stages opposition through its monothematic premise whereby every week it reveals a critique of the president but presented as fact, and it extends the trope of good vs evil, the us versus them trope. Each episode begins with a stand-up monologue by Lanata, who is not a comedian, but nonetheless performs a parody of the president's speeches and demeanor. There is an excess of close-ups, over emphasizing the face and eyes, once again a staple of telenovela framing. Lanata's linguistic parody and satire- of which there are multiple layers operating in his monologue: the parody of the professional stand-up comedian, that of US comedy/news shows, and lastly that of the president's ideology. However here, both satire and parody ceases to function since it does not have the capacity to dismantle nor critique power. As the stand-up monologue ends, the audience begins to hear from off stage a chant that states: *queremos preguntar* « we want to ask ». This leads to the raising of the stage's curtain, revealing a stage full of prominent news personalities from the group's media platforms continuing in their chant. This staging of saving the press fails as does the previous monologue, since it reinforces the voice of the journalistic corporate establishment. PPT loses its ability to critique power since it is staging its own strength through the image of key television and radio personalities standing in opposition to the president. PPT's chant of „we want to ask“ makes its way to citizens who replicate media messages as we see at Harvard's forum. One of the students

<sup>26</sup> Cristina Fernández de Kirchner's Public Address (Full Video). [Online] [2019-12-05]. Available at: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N9LY4qhXEXs&t=1224s>>.

opens his question by stating „I’m privileged to be one of the few Argentineans who can ask you questions“<sup>27</sup>, which is followed by another student who reiterates the same statement of being privileged to ask questions. The president responded to all these questions with a sense of agitation and started to express annoyance. While she did provide adequate answers that spoke to each question she did not hold back her opinions regarding the types of questions and also criticized the way the questions were asked. Some of her statements include: „not very academic, what was the question? Ah, you forgot? Inform yourself better. As your little classmate stated, Come on guys, we are in Harvard.“<sup>28</sup> She even joked about the inability of some students to clearly read questions from a piece of paper. While her reactions and side comments detract from the main goal of her talk, they do bolster her image as a charismatic and passionate leader whose discourse is highly inflected by melodramatic elements. CFK’s demeanor, inflection, and stance become very theatrical and performative.

## 5. Conclusion

The research presented here explores the reach of melodrama and populism as two communicational strategies that help in solidifying and extending political thought. Rather than being seen as two separate areas such as part of the cultural and political spheres, melodrama and its formulaic narrative of emotional excess intersect populist rhetoric. Through the public address by CFK at Harvard’s John F. Kennedy’s Forum, I established how her speech forms part of a performance to publicly display the possibilities of populism. Populism understood as a modality of politics to group and interpolate one group against another. As evinced in her talk, CFK parts from the theory of the *civilizing era*, as a moment in Argentinean history that demarcates two opposing groups. There is the group who has been marginalized and suffered the consequences of the *Lost Decade* due to neoliberal policies, and the group that embraces an unrestricted economy, as professed by developed nations. For CFK it is the former who must rise and take a leading role in society. Along with the speech, I interpreted the question and answer period as yet another moment when populism is performed. Both questions and answers between the president and the students present stage the contentions that pull apart notions of the *civilizing era*. That is, those opposed envision it only as a rhetorical strategy that hide ulterior motives, while those in favor see it as a reconsideration of those whose privilege had previously gone unquestioned. Nonetheless, what one finds present in both narratives is a striking call to the emotions and a passionate urgency to be heard.

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Cordula Simon

# Deconstructionism And Language Shift – The Scientific Troubles Of Political Correctness

## ABSTRACT

Deconstructionism teaches us, that power lies within language, or rather that power decides, what language is supposed to mean. The old question asked in Alice in Wonderland: „*Who decides, what words mean?*“ builds up to the discrepancy in any language between the individual speaker’s intention and his or her position in the political power hierarchy. In recent decades calls for a more humane language have arisen, giving birth to movements of political correctness in the Western hemisphere, making it an issue of globalisation being fairly paired with left-wing ideology, making everyday conversation a subject of critique, calling for normative changes in language and ultimately facing the same question everywhere: Does it in fact help? This paper will shed light on the empirical linguistic knowledge we possess on the connection between form and content, going back to De Saussure and following the discourse of language and power in an historical manner, thus taking a hard look at the theoretical background of the dynamics of power and language, building a chronology of deconstructivist theorists like Derrida, Foucault, Bourdieu, and Barthes. These theories will be paralleled with the so-called linguistic turn from its beginning to the nowadays so popular Neo-Whorfian approach. Finally the deconstructivist method will be put in contrast to what we know about the connection between language on action following John Austin, circling back to the postmodern discursive approach known in everyday life: The language policing of everyday conversations by individual speakers, representing the deconstructivist movement, comparing it to the empirical data about language and culture, the named and the unnamed, empowerment and the mechanics of language shifting that were subject to studies already more than a hundred years ago, focusing on the shift of meaning and tabooing of vocabulary, dissecting what critics of political correctness call the „*euphemism treadmill*“, building up to the effects of political correctness we have come to experience so far. The goal is to finally answer the question, whether language policing and the growing public attention to the use of language do have an egalitarian effect on reality.

## KEY WORDS

Deconstructionism. Language shift. Overview. Political correctness. Neo-Whorfianism. Euphemism treadmill.



## 1. Introduction

For some of us politically correct speech is a way of expressing their concerns with other people's feelings, and we try to abstain from using hurtful speech, it is a way of being humane with words. For others it only appears to be an unnatural corset to naturally grown language. The specific phenomenon of political correctness might not be the only language regulation known to mankind, but one that has emerged extensively in recent decades in the whole Western hemisphere, making it notable on a global scale while soaking into everyday conversation. The questions asked here are supposed to create an overview of what is taught nowadays about the interconnection of language and society. What is the source of all these slogans used to defend the practice of speech policing? Where do the quotes of those correcting other people's language on a day to day basis find their academical pendant? From which academical background do phrases like „*language is power*“, „*language is action*“, „*language is a weapon*“, „*words hurt*“ etc. come from? What role does the intention of the speaker take Deconstructionism teaches us, that power lies within language, or rather that power decides, what language is supposed to mean.

## 2. Methodology

In the first chapter the theories in which political correctness originated will be set in relation to their likewise theoretical predecessors. Where do the slogans come from, and what theoretical background do they have? Here we examine in a historical manner De Saussure and follow the academical discourse of language and power, building a chronology of deconstructivist theorists, starting with Derrida, Lacan, Bourdieu, Foucault, Barthes until finally closing with Said, Butler and Deleuze. In the same chapter we will approach the language of philosophy, following the so-called linguistic turn with the same method, focusing on Wittgenstein, Hegel and Whorf. The deconstructivist method will then be put in contrast with what we know about the connection between language on action following John Austin, circling back to the postmodern discursive approach known in everyday life and a discussion on the connection of these theories.

In the next chapter these theories will be put side by side with the method and results of some of the most infamous studies on language and society: the claims made by defenders of political correctness. What are the studies saying about the theories, where are they contradictory and what are their conditions? Here we will take a look at the Neo-Whorfian approach to language, at the puzzle of the number of genders in a language and the so called euphemism treadmill, closing with the linguistic theoretical bases in which we see the results of these studies reflected, trusting, that the empirical experiment is more reliable than any unproven theory. The discrepancies between those results will be discussed.

This piece is merely a who-said-what of academical graveness in the field, asking: what did the theorists the political movement is built upon actually write and what happens, when we compare it to the empirical work done on the subject on language and society? What is the knowledge we have about language, how do these theories fit with deconstructionism or Whorfism? Are the linguistic facts living up to the theories? This text aims to take a look at the dynamics between language and power by going back to the sources and summarizing their actual content and by putting the great names we are confronted with in discussions about language policing in comparison to one another and subsequently by examining contradictions and similarities. It is merely a short overview on sources and research. The goal is to finally answer the question, whether language policing and the growing public attention to the use of language have an egalitarian effect on reality.

## 3. Purely theoretical arguments for speech policing

### 3.1 Language is discourse/power

I have to expose the reader to quite a lot of information up front and put all of it into tiny packages, in a way similar to which students nowadays are confronted with, in a way I was confronted with in Gender- and Cultural studies courses: Jacques Derrida's theories were based on the easily understood division of what a sign is according to Saussure:<sup>1</sup> the connection of arbitrariness, convention, and association. Even onomatopoeia like cock-a-doodle-doo and kikeriki differ from one another. It is the reason, why we have different languages. The word for tree neither looks like a tree, nor sounds like a tree. To break it down: Derrida looked at the structure of society and saw that no meaning is ever fixed.<sup>2</sup>

The idea of the unfixed meaning got taken up by Lacan<sup>3</sup> in the field of psychoanalysis, as well as Bourdieu and Foucault in sociology, with Lacan stating, that without language there would be no meaning of self and Bourdieu noting, that what is meant and understood is a question of the position one occupies in the social field.<sup>4</sup> Meaning, as Foucault and his companions noted, was a manifestation of power and power is therefore reflected in discourse.<sup>5</sup> This is a truly exciting idea that can't be verified or falsified as no one stands outside society or power hierarchies and even academic knowledge exchange takes place inside the web of discourses.

What Derrida originally suggested as a way of interpreting literature and historical texts by finding oppositions and presumptions in it, soon became an instrument to analyse society as a whole: deconstruction. Not only reducing even the most artistic pieces of writing to mere social commentary, but also dissecting everyday speech in everyday life. The premise goes something like this: the powerless must be deconstructing the discourse, not leaving the decision over what something means to the powerful because discourse is language.

### 3.2 Language is action/performance/violence

Then a new wave of theorists like Deleuze<sup>6</sup> Said<sup>7</sup>, and Butler<sup>8</sup> emerged with their own furthering concepts. These theorists claim or at least strongly suggest, that language is always action, it is always performance. Let's exemplify this with Butler.

That language is always action is supposed to go back to John Austin, but Judith Butler doesn't even quote Austin – not in *Gender Trouble*<sup>9</sup> anyway where she claims that society inscribes itself into the human body through language. She does not provide a conclusive argument how exactly this happens, there's no empirical work and quite a few paragraphs end

<sup>1</sup> DE SAUSSURE, F.: *Course de linguistique générale*. Paris, Saint Germain : Éditions Poyot & Rivages, 1997, p. 97.

<sup>2</sup> See also: DERRIDA, J.: *Of Grammatology*. 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition. Baltimore : Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016.

<sup>3</sup> See also: LACAN, J.: *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*. New York : Norton & Company, 2008.

<sup>4</sup> See also: BOURDIEU, P.: *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Cambridge : University Press, 1977.

<sup>5</sup> See also: FOUCAULT, M.: *The Essential Works of Michel Foucault 1954-1984*. 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition. London : Penguin, 2002.

<sup>6</sup> See also: DELEUZE, G.: *Logic of Sense*. London, Oxford : Bloomsbury Academic, 2015.

<sup>7</sup> See also: SAID, E. W.: *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient*. 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition. London : Penguin Classics, 1995.

<sup>8</sup> See also: BUTLER, J.: *Gender Trouble. Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York, London : Routledge, 1990.

<sup>9</sup> BUTLER, J.: *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*. New York, London : Routledge, 1997, p. 149.

with a question mark. She quotes Bourdieu and Derrida. Even in her work *Excitable Speech*<sup>10</sup> she rather presents everything originating from Austin with the interpretations of later theorists. Even though she puts one quote from Austin at the front of her work: „*Infelicity is an ill to which all acts are heir which have the general character of ritual or ceremonial, all conventional acts*“.<sup>11</sup> From this she deduces on the first page of *Excitable Speech*, that all language is acting. Something that this quote logically simply can't confirm. But what was it, that Austin actually said?<sup>12</sup> Speech acts are acts of phones, which are the sounds coming out of one's mouth, and they are not only constative or performative, but they can be both, much like on a scale between describing the world (constative) and acting with speech (performative). If a ship is named, the performance is clearly visible, but also statements about the world can have a reason, why they are said, which is often only to be found in their context. Even if someone talks to himself, there might be psychological reasons, but does that change the world in any manner? You'd have to be a strong believer of the butterfly effect to agree with a statement like this. Today speech acts are still classified by Austin's system. This means ignoring something he was fully aware of, by calling the centre of his science „*acts of phones*“ – it's the sound you hear, the form it takes. Everything else, the statement about the world, the action itself and the intentions of the speaker are different parts of speech. The form takes a special place in every theory of speech and communication. The one thing, that can only be judged aesthetically if it can be judged at all. Making this crucial distinction is the very foundation of twentieth century linguistics, because it reflects Ferdinand de Saussure's signifiant and signifié.

While Austin, when read closely, can't serve to legitimize language policing, he might still be seen as an authority on language philosophy, people throwing his name around tend to ignore his work: intention as part of his speech act classification is then substituted by convention which is seen as more powerful in e.g. Butler's *Excitable Speech*.<sup>13</sup> The act of phones on the other hand gets simply ignored. The highly selective method of reading early theorists, philosophers and empirical fieldworkers on the subjects leads to arguments built on authority, even though the authority never might have written anything closely to lead to nowadays conclusions. Even his closest predecessor John Searle writes in the 1990s, that the borders of meaning are the borders of the speaker's intentions and that analysis shows, what can be done with language is limited.<sup>14</sup> So, John Austin never claimed that every utterance in every situation is performance and therefore action, he just played with the thought that we can't draw an exact border between the description of the world and acting with words. The premise of the deconstructivist theory nevertheless narrowed it down to this: the powerless must be deconstructing the discourse, not leaving the decision of what anything means to the powerful. Discourse is language, language is action, and therefore language can be violence.

### 3.3 The recipient produces the text/message

The final purely theoretical argument is delivered by Roland Barthes, who took care of any intention or convention altogether, giving the recipient full authority over the meaning.<sup>15</sup> Barthes' writing denies all of this: convention, context, intention. But if the recipient is the one mostly

<sup>10</sup> See also: BUTLER, J.: *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*. New York, London : Routledge, 1997.

<sup>11</sup> BUTLER, J.: *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*. New York, London : Routledge, 1997, p. 1.

<sup>12</sup> See also: AUSTIN, J. L.: *How to Do Things with Words*. The William James Lectures delivered at Harvard University in 1955. London : Oxford Clarendon, 1962.

<sup>13</sup> BUTLER, J.: *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*. New York, London : Routledge, 1997, p. 34, 51, 168.

<sup>14</sup> SEARLE, J. R.: *Geist, Sprache und Gesellschaft*. Frankfurt a. M : Suhrkamp, 2004, p. 179.

<sup>15</sup> See also: BARTHES, R.: *The Death of the Author*. London : Taylor & Francis, 2018.

producing the text, that doesn't always make individual interpretation righteous, but makes it rather a mere question of what most people read into something. Also if the recipient is the one producing the meaning, this very same theory could be used as legitimization that the writer or producer of speech is always free of guilt and any misunderstanding is the recipient's fault. As we know the truth lies rather in between, as human miscommunication tends to happen, but can be dealt with. Barthes was also criticized for this approach in Foucault's "Qu'est-ce qu'un auteur?" in<sup>16</sup> 1969 in front of the Société Française de Philosophie. It is highly doubtful that Derrida would recognize his own thinking in the politicized strategies his successors knitted out of them.

The premise of the deconstructionist theory therefore narrows even more: The powerless must be deconstructing the discourse, not leaving the decision of what anything means to the powerful. Discourse is language, language is action, and therefore language can be violence. The recipient of speech is always right about its meaning, so if the recipient feels offended the speaker has to be condemned.

That's a rather short summary of how we got from understanding, that the form is not shackled to its content, to quite a significant amount of people in academia being sure that changing forms would change the world. So the basic premise seems right even if unverifiable, but in Austin's writing, circumstances, purposes and intentions have to result in a certain situation. While early Deconstructionism logical arguments are followed (Derrida, Foucault, Bourdieu) they don't provide arguments for language policing. Later theorists (e.g. Butler) rather depend on claims and suggestions, reproducing concepts as slogans in a highly selective manner; however none of them did any empirical fieldwork.

## 4. The so-called linguistic turn

In an historical context this development might partially be related to parallel theories of what is called the linguistic turn, which ironically hasn't got a lot to do with linguistics, but rather with philosophy about language. Ludwig Wittgenstein is supposed to be the predecessor of this movement. The idea was pretty trendy at the time: The *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*<sup>17</sup>, trying to put the world in final formal order, stating that the borders of the mind are those of language. Instinctively that may sound right, as in our human experience we believe we can say just about anything. It doesn't matter if we need to describe or define something to make ourselves clear. We have managed fine so far, haven't we? He was actually not the first to stumble onto that idea. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel<sup>18</sup> also put a little something about this topic together once upon a time. Wittgenstein is often considered the one to have kicked off the linguistic turn. Austin and Saussure are often considered to be part of it, even though most of their work predated the *Tractatus*, and philosophical viewpoints were not their only focus, but rather empirical data and especially in Austin's philosophy it was not an ideal language, but the reality of language that took the main stage. The adamant reality of language later caused Wittgenstein to withdraw from his previous theories in the *Tractatus*, in his lectures resulting in the so called *Blue Book*,<sup>19</sup> as he realized, that language doesn't always follow the most logical

<sup>16</sup> FOUCAULT, M.: „Was ist ein Autor?“. In JANNIDIS, F. et al. (eds.): *Texte zur Theorie der Autorschaft*. Stuttgart : Reclam, 2000, p. 198–229.

<sup>17</sup> See also: WITTGENSTEIN, L.: *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. Asheville : Chiron Academic, 2016.

<sup>18</sup> See also: NIEGOT, A.: „Es ist in Namen, dass wir denken.“ *Sprache und Denken bei Hegel*. Duisburg-Essen : LINSE, 2004.

<sup>19</sup> See also: WITTGENSTEIN, L.: *The Blue and Brown Books*. New York : Harper Torchbooks, 1965; BRIDGES, J.: *The Search for „The Essence of Human Language“*. In VERHEGGEN, C. (ed.): *Wittgenstein and Davidson on Language, Thought, and Action*. Toronto : Cambridge University Press, 2017, p. 139-159.

path, in a similar way that Hegel threw his philosophy of language out the window, as we know from his posthumous published notes.<sup>20</sup> Sadly, barely anyone seemed to notice within the discourse of language policing. While Wittgenstein and Austin were racking their brains to figure out how meaning evolves in speech, nowadays it is common that people demanding politically correct speech, assume that their interpretation is right at any time and the speaker often just doesn't realize, what is meant by his words, but the recipient does.

## 5. Arguments with listed empirical evidence

### 5.1 Language influences everyday culture

Let's look at arguments for which we do have empirical evidence: the claim that language influences everyday culture.

One more reason that makes the „*language constructs our world*“- credo so attractive, might be found in Benjamin Lee Whorf's writing.<sup>21</sup> He was a contemporary of Wittgenstein and built his ideas from one theory, sticking to it until his very end: If a culture has no word for something, said culture doesn't have (un)said thing. Did you know, that the Italians have a single word for the little ring of spilled coffee on a coaster or table when you take the cup away? It's called „*culaccino*“. We instinctively do know this „*thing*“. We wipe it away with a napkin. Do we have a word for it in English, German or Russian? No. But believing in language being functional, I'm quite sure I did a sufficient job expressing, what I mean. There also needs to be considered that Whorf was not being exactly the empirical working type. He claimed that Eskimos, as they were called in his days have hundreds of words for snow.<sup>22</sup> That is simply not true, there are only two lexems, from which all other words derive from. It is a highly complex language after all. But barely anyone bothered – the idea was so tempting, lifting language up into being even more powerful than it is, that even in 1980 Dale Spender just assumed he is right in *Man Made Language*.<sup>23</sup>

The discrepancy of what is proven and what isn't, is not even noticed in the 1990s when Deborah Cameron in „*Feminist Linguistics*“ quotes Saussure's theory of the sign and Whorf in the same breath. She just concludes that they would not be likely to agree with one another.<sup>24</sup> Let's take another example: In Gender Studies there is plenty of talk about how amazing this tribe of Quechua south of the Titicaca lake is, as they have ten social genders. Isn't that amazing? Looking Quechua up in *The World Atlas of Language Structures*<sup>25</sup>, which was originally published by the Oxford University Press in 2005 and is now being digitally maintained by departments of the Max Planck Society in Leipzig, there is something odd to be found: The Quechua have no distinction of gender in their language. But there exist languages with „*five genders or more*“. Zulu for example. But in their culture they recognize exactly two genders – not even a third one. My pick of samples here would suggest, that less gender in a language might allow for

<sup>20</sup> See also: NIEGOT, A.: „*Es ist in Namen, dass wir denken.*“ *Sprache und Denken bei Hegel*. Duisburg-Essen : LINSE, 2004.

<sup>21</sup> See also: WHORF, B. L.: *Language, Thought, and Reality: Selected Writings of Benjamin Lee Whorf*. Cambridge : MIT Press Ltd, 2012.

<sup>22</sup> MCWHORTER, J. H.: *The Language Hoax. The World Looks the Same in Any Language*. New York : Oxford University Press, 2014, p. 50.

<sup>23</sup> See also: SPENDER, D.: *Man Made Language*. Ontario : Pandora, 1980.

<sup>24</sup> CAMERON, D.: *Feminism & Linguistic Theory*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. London, Hampshire : Macmillan, 1992, p. 194.

<sup>25</sup> *The World Atlas of Language Structures Online*. [online]. [2020-03-30]. Available at: <<http://wals.info/chapter/31>>.

more gender possibilities in cultures, but don't be misled by any confirmation bias, it isn't true: A hundred more examples will show that the connection is arbitrary.<sup>26</sup>

But, and here comes the exciting part: with the help of surveys and computerized tests we are nowadays in a position to check up on theories like that in the most precise way. Today you can watch a TED-talk video from Lera Boroditsky (a cognitive scientist) who takes a Neo-Whorfian approach, claiming, that nowadays we do have all the data we need.<sup>27</sup> We know, she explains, that people whose language order puts time vertically rather than horizontally, are faster to orientate the vertical way, or orienting by directions as north and south changes how they put things in order. So, yes, there is data. Yes, it is empirical. It also might have something to do with the writing direction in these cultures but, as John McWhorter shows impressively in *The Language Hoax*,<sup>28</sup> often the differences are about milliseconds and therefore without measurable influence on the everyday lives of people, because in the end, every language can express anything and we are more similar than we are different. From an egalitarian point of view this could be considered the preferable outcome. Boroditsky also talks about something that got hold of German public language: gender in language and how it shapes thought. She explains that in languages such as German a bridge has a female article and in tests people characterize it with female stereotypes: beautiful, elegant, etc. In languages in which bridge has a male article, people would say strong, robust, etc. She suggests the article is changing the view of the world. But is it really? Isn't it rather a chicken-egg-problem and the meaning was there before the word even existed, as so often happens? Because maybe history of language might tell us,<sup>29</sup> that articles in Indo-Germanic languages had other dimensions of indicating meaning attached to them as e.g. in the Germanic language things of use around the household would have a female article, no matter which language they originated from, or what article or gender they might have been used with in another language? The historic development, parts of comparative linguistics and the arbitrariness of language is ignored in Neo-Whorfianism. Well: Words don't arise out of a vacuum, and their history is a muddy one.

## 5.2 Reframing to raise awareness

The second argument brought forward with empirical work done on it is that language raises awareness and challenges prejudices. Now we arrived not only at the researching but also the consulting part: linguists try to raise awareness and „reframe“.

There seem to exist quite a number of linguistic consultants in the world of media and politics like e.g. George Lakoff and Elisabeth Wehling.<sup>30</sup> Suggesting new terms, as McWhorter noted about Lakoff, or even new phrases or framing, works only for a limited period.<sup>31</sup> Steven

<sup>26</sup> CORBET, C. G.: Number of Genders. Sex-based and Non-sex-based Gender Systems. Systems of Gender Assignment. In DRYER, M. S., HASPELMATH, M. (eds.): *The World Atlas of Language Structures Online*. Leipzig : Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology, 2013. [online]. [2018-03-30]. Available at: <<http://wals.info/chapter/31>>.

<sup>27</sup> BORODITSKY, L.: *How language shapes the way we think*. TEDWomen 2017. New Orleans : Ted Conference 2017. (Full Video) HD. [online]. [2020-01-08]. Available at: <[https://www.ted.com/talks/lera\\_boroditsky\\_how\\_language\\_shapes\\_the\\_way\\_we\\_think#t-405269](https://www.ted.com/talks/lera_boroditsky_how_language_shapes_the_way_we_think#t-405269)>.

<sup>28</sup> MCWHORTER, J. H.: *The Language Hoax. Why the World Looks the Same in Any Language*. New York : Oxford University Press, 2014, p. 37.

<sup>29</sup> See also: ALVANOUDI, A.: Aspects of the meaning of gender. In *International Journal of Language and Culture*, 2016, Vol. 3, No. 1, p. 56-67.

<sup>30</sup> See also: JOHNSON, M., LAKOFF, G.: *Metaphors We Live By*. London : University of Chicago Press, 2003; WEHLING, E.: *Politisches Framing. Wie eine Nation sich ihr Denken einredet – und daraus Politik macht*. Bonn : Bundeszentrale für Politische Bildung, 2017.

<sup>31</sup> MCWHORTER, J. H.: *The Language Hoax. The World Looks the Same in Any Language*. New York : Oxford University Press, 2014, p. 230.



Pinker coined the term „*euphemism treadmill*“. This refers to the simple fact that people are not supposed to use one word, so they will use another to replace it and in no time it will fulfill the previous one's function, fill the semantic hole and sound as tainted as the original one. But what is it, that „*sound*“? It is the everlasting game between connotation and denotation. And we knew those things – which mean they have been checked empirically – before all of those theories above evolved.

In 1880 a book was published in Germany by the linguist and lexicographer Hermann Paul who put the German language under close examination. It was called “The principles of the history Language”.<sup>32</sup> One of the most intriguing chapters is called Language shift, examining the question of how language changes. He also (with quite some casualness) made a distinction between change of phones, of the form and how a word sounds differently than in earlier stages of the language, and the shift of meaning. For example he takes the German word for woman „*Frau*“: If a word is overused it is likely to lose connotations, and the meaning will widen, the word derived from the medieval „*frôwe*“, which in the beginning meant a noble woman, and later became the word for all women, pushing aside the word „*wîp*“. So it lost the connotation of aristocratic heritage. Was there a powerful uprising of women in the Middle Ages we somehow missed? By no means. But minstrels and poets started to use the word in their songs for common women, to express how special they were in their eyes. The habit got picked up by common people and voilà: The meaning changed. To fill the semantic gap for aristocratic women, „*noble*“ had to be explicitly added after this change.

What happens, if a word gets lost or prohibited? Attempts to change language forcefully are to be found all through history, the phenomenon is nothing new. Does the meaning disappear? We know that words disappear, if whatever they named goes out of existence or use. But the other way around? The connotation just happily hops onto the next best thing. People just would use the next best word in the previous sense and that's what it would become. We might just overuse words like „*cunt*“ or „*nigger*“ and the connotation will wash out eventually, if we try to use it in an alternative context, it might just lose the connotation of being an insult. A strategy adapted for example by the Hip-Hop group N.W.A („*Niggaz With Attitudes*“). The effect was rather small as language change only happens when applied from the great mass of speakers of any language. Alternatively applied only to whites the word might lose the meaning of referring to what nowadays seems to be called „*POC*“. With „*cunt*“ we have the connotations of an insult, female and genitalia. Would we only apply it to men, then most likely it would lose connotation of referring to females. Applied in a more neutral sense or even pet name it might lose its insulting quality. So we can see now how it works, but is this helpful? What happened, when the new Soviet regime in Russia introduced the word „*activist*“ in a positive manner? It became a slur.

Also something else happens with phrases of inclusion, as it is happening with singular words that are prone to another common misbelief: Just by telling everyone the word they are using is a racist or sexist insult, they will stop using it, and both those things will be abolished in perpetuity. Sometimes the terms are then used in ironical ways – even in polite form unfriendly content can appear, as e.g. in Vienna even the word „*person*“ can be used as an insult. If there is meaning to be expressed, it will find its expression. The trouble with framing and substitution of phrases by linguistic consultants is that they are not long lived, because of the euphemism treadmill.

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<sup>32</sup> PAUL, H.: *Prinzipien der Sprachgeschichte*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. Halle : Max Niemeyer, 1886, p. 66.

### 5.3 Solid data?

Taking a hard look at the empirical research also means taking a closer look at all the studies out there, claiming to have figured out exactly how language and society influence each other.

In Germany's official state communication people are now obligated to use the male and the female form in any reference to humans, to make the female part of a group „visible“. Not only does this already seem troublesome for those who are neither male nor female, but we have already taken a look at the Quechua. There are a lot of people doing research on this, there are more than 80.000 articles with the subject of gender and language on academia.eu, a lot of them purely theoretical reproducing the theoretical claims I've already talked about in the first parts of this article and quite a view thousand, empirical research papers.

We are left with some hard methodological troubles in any case: firstly some papers stay purely theoretical on the weak legs I examined, but there are also questions about the quality of research: participants are often from the own peer group of those creating the surveys and are therefore trying to prove the point about the power of language, students from the very same field or within the same ideological bubble. As we always have trouble finding participants for empirical work, this has remained something challenging for a pretty long time. In fact people in the linguistic field themselves complain about it.

Secondly the time frame between theoretical work and empirical study is sometimes worrisome. Is data fully reliable, if a theory (e.g. language shapes the world) is propagated for thirty to forty years in a certain social field and afterwards data is collected in exactly that field, asking women, if they might have the feeling, that they are not included, if they are not mentioned? This circumstance has been discussed in academia at least since the 1960s, and at least since the 1980s in the media. I was invited to participate in a study, that was much more a questionnaire than a survey even in 2019 when awareness in the media for these subjects already broadly exists. In this flood of articles I've mentioned before, the earliest surveys asking these questions can be found in the 1980s.<sup>33</sup> Possible solutions would be to repeat surveys in intervals to research the influence of academical framing of what language is supposed to, as much as language shift requiring diverse groups of participants, which means to look for new ways to find participants or to observe language in the sociotope of social media, where speech acts are not academically framed at all. Our data is not exactly rock solid.

Thirdly the surveys and studies mentioned in books claiming, that language influences culture in a certain way, as in Elisabeth Wehling's<sup>34</sup> or Guy Deutscher's<sup>35</sup> work, do seem to have enormously low replication rates and in psychological journals a quite unsettling dominant publication bias seems to exist:<sup>36</sup> What doesn't prove the theory but contradicts it, will simply not get published. From a purely methodological, scientific point of view this is catastrophic.

There is no solution to terms and phrases being coined to make them last longer, especially since the internet language shift goes ever faster and in turn the treadmill turns faster with it. Still, the correlation of reframing and language shift would be an interesting field to research on its own. Bias in the academical field has to be worked on with a higher priority.

<sup>33</sup> This claim is due to the fact, that in all the online sources I checked looking for answers, I could not find any studies trying to answer this question before the 1980s. If you happen to find early studies on the subject please feel free to contact me.

<sup>34</sup> See also: WEHLING, E.: *Politisches Framing. Wie eine Nation sich ihr Denken einredet – und daraus Politik macht*. Bonn : Bundeszentrale für Politische Bildung, 2017.

<sup>35</sup> See also: DEUTSCHER, G.: *Through the Language Glass. Why the World Looks Different in Other Languages*. New York : Metropolitan Books, 2010.

<sup>36</sup> BARGH, J. A.: *Estimating Reproducibility of Psychology (No. 140): An Open Post-Publication Peer-Review*. [online]. [2020-02-25]. Available at: <<https://replicationindex.com/category/priming/>>.

## 6. Conclusion

I am not claiming that language shouldn't be changed, out of crude conservatism, and that language would deteriorate simply because of change. Language has always changed, even though it might have been slowed down by the invention of printing techniques and sped up again by the internet. When an expression for something is necessary in a society, words will appear and the more people are using them, the better the chance the words will stick around for a while. There is definitely a chance for the they/them pronoun for example, especially because it already is historically grown.<sup>37</sup> None of the purely theoretical arguments hold up, as they seem to collide with other theories and empirical work can't back them up. No matter how much research is invested in the subject, we don't have exact knowledge about language and its influence on culture or the thinking human being. Therefore the claim that speech policing will provide certain predictable influence in reality remains unproven.

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Ana Catarina Monteiro

## Interactive Digital Narratives: A Close Reading Of Bandersnatch To Analyze The Aesthetic Relations With The User

### ABSTRACT

Computational and interactive technologies are ubiquitous and play an increasingly important role in our daily lives. From the oral language to the written word and printing, we have been building and expanding our capacity to provide information and present it through fictional or non-fictional narratives, allowing newfangled models through which we learn and interpret the world. As new representations transformed these new digital environments, through procedural, encyclopedic, spatial, and participative affordances, narratives have also changed and afforded a set of different scenarios, where users are given the possibility to experience and understand the same system by exploring different paths. Interactive digital narratives are open and complex works that cross different approaches, research fields, and emerging technologies, but are always shaped by interaction, from creation to reception. They also explore social, cultural, ideological, and aesthetic elements, where it is significant to comprehend how these computational formats can help us to allow new positions and points of view, modeling how we construct meaning, examining the relationship between user and technology and how human beings perceive the world. Analyzing the aesthetic qualities of the Netflix production *Bandersnatch* through immersion, agency, and transformation, and combining these with an analytical framework that studies the dimensions of user experience, we develop a close reading, that analyzes the development of aesthetic relations and its transformational potential in interactive digital narratives.

### KEY WORDS

Interactive digital narratives. Aesthetic. Interaction. *Bandersnatch*.



# 1. Introduction

Over the last few decades, we have witnessed several situations where computer and interactive systems have become an integral part of all aspects of our social and cultural life. From this ubiquity of the new digital media, it is essential to look at the variety of formats that arise from here.

The narrative, considered one of the most fundamental cognitive mechanisms for understanding the world, presents itself as a critical factor by which it is possible to build diverse dialogue relations, capable of helping individuals and societies. „A narrative is a sign with a signifier (discourse) and a signified (story, mental image, semantic representation).“<sup>1</sup>

Interactive digital narratives (IDN), apart from being reinforced by the characteristic of procedurally, where the computer as an artifact capable of executing a set of rules, becomes an attractive vehicle for telling stories,<sup>2</sup> supports all the other features of digital environments, being therefore participatory, spatial and encyclopedic.<sup>3</sup> To the extent that procedurally, and participation generally correspond to the complex meaning attributed to the word *interaction*, their ability to represent navigable spaces, as well as the ability to expose enormous amounts of information in digital format, is related to the fact that they are immersive.<sup>4</sup> Thus, and because all these characteristics determine them, the IDN, is also characterized by presenting a duality surface and subface,<sup>5</sup> where „we do not usually have access to the subface (...) which is the algorithm, the description of the class, the program-and-data. In the same manner of describing the situation, the surface is the image on the screen, in projection, be it still or dynamic, passive, or interactive.“<sup>6</sup> This complexity makes these digital artifacts into open works that are works in progress, whose embodiment is manifested in movements, places, collective dynamics, but no longer in individuals expressing themselves in „art without a signature“ or art with multiple signatures.<sup>7</sup> It affects not only the nature and form of the narratives themselves but also the relationships that both authors and users can develop between them.<sup>8</sup>

The creators of IDN must have the capability to project a system in a mode that the contents can appear in the imagination of the users as if they were truly there. That way, the narratives are understood as mental constructions in which the action and interaction of the user to the system trigger responses.<sup>9</sup> Thus, for Murray, the success of any interactive digital narrative is its „dramatic agency.“ By defining the concept of agency as a result of the attractive exploration of procedural and participatory properties and the result of user expectations aroused by a

<sup>1</sup> RYAN, M. L.: Beyond myth and metaphor: Narrative in digital media. In *Game Studies*, 2001, Vol. 1, No. 1, p. 1. [online]. [2020-02-05]. Available at: <<http://www.gamestudies.org/0101/ryan/>>.

<sup>2</sup> MURRAY, J.: *Hamlet on the Holodeck: The Future of Narrative in Cyberspace*. New York : Free Press, 1997, p. 99.

<sup>3</sup> MURRAY, J.: *Inventing the medium: Principles of Interaction Design as a Cultural Practice*. London : MIT Press, 2012, p. 51.

<sup>4</sup> MURRAY, J.: *Hamlet on the Holodeck: The Future of Narrative in Cyberspace*. New York : Free Press, 1997, p. 120.

<sup>5</sup> NAKE, F.: The Disappearing Masterpiece. In VERDICCHIO, M., CLIFFORD, A., RANGEL, A., CARVALHAIS, M. (eds.): *xCoAx 2016: Proceedings of the fourth conference on Computation, Communication, Aesthetics, and X*. Bergamo : Universidade do Porto Praça Gomes Teixeira, 2016, p. 16. [online]. [2020-02-25]. Available at: <<http://2016.xcoax.org/xcoax2016.pdf>>.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>7</sup> CARVALHAIS, M.: *Artificial Aesthetics: Creative Practices in Computational Art and Design*. Porto : UPorto Edições, 2016, p. 233.

<sup>8</sup> CARVALHAIS, M., CARDOSO, P.: Empathy in the Ergodic Experience of Computational Aesthetics. In ADEBAYO, R., FAROUK, I., JONES, S., RAPEANEMATHONSI, M. (eds.): *Proceedings of the 24th International Symposium on Electronic Art*. South Africa, Durban : Faculty of Arts and Design, Durban University of Technology, 2018, p. 222. [online]. [2020-02-15]. Available at: <<http://www.isea-international.org/isea2018/>>.

<sup>9</sup> KOENITZ, H.: *Towards a Specific Theory of Interactive Digital Narrative*. NY : Routledge, 2016, p. 93.

highly interactive environment, leading them to act in a way that results in a set of appropriate responses to the digital environment in which they are inserted,<sup>10</sup> she explains that:

„To create dramatic agency the designer must create transparent interaction conventions (like clicking on the image of a garment to put it on the player's avatar) and map them onto actions which suggest rich story possibilities (like donning a magic cloak and suddenly becoming invisible) within clear story stories with dramatically focused episodes (such as, an opportunity to spy on enemy conspirators in a fantasy role-playing game).“<sup>11</sup>

Therefore, IDN provide a set of different scenarios in which we understand the same events in different ways, and we recreate the same starting points to give multiple results.<sup>12</sup> Accordingly, these narratives are amplified and transformed repeatedly through space and time and described as a „medium that we use instrumentally as a tool while communicating with it as a medium.“<sup>13</sup> This way, they contribute to the recollection of certain information and new forms of identity, having effects on individual human beings and humanity, altering the view of the world as well as the intellectual capacities themselves.<sup>14</sup> Thus, IDN are also considered „dispositifs“ defined by Foucault<sup>15</sup> as something that refers to the broader social, cultural, ideological, and aesthetic elements that organize knowledge and power relations.

This impact led by IDN becomes possible due to the aesthetic qualities that they present and that are characterized by Immersion, Agency, and Transformation.<sup>16</sup> Stories are constructed by the power of transportation inside the narrative, identification with the characters, and taking responsibility for actions.<sup>17</sup> The experience of being transported to a simulated place is called immersion, which may require a pure flood of sensations into the mind, but involves learning to do the things that the new environment makes possible.<sup>18</sup> As an aesthetic value, „immersion requires consistency and detail, and most of all a careful regulation of the boundary between the imaginary and the real.“<sup>19</sup> Besides that, its action is even more significant when there is a combination between immersion and interactivity, producing a significant Active Creation of Belief, translated by the attention we give to the surrounding world and the way we use intelligence to reinforce this idea instead of questioning the reality of experience.<sup>20</sup>

If the sensation of immersion into the narrative world is well played, more actively, we want to act within it. When this performance presents tangible results, we are faced with the second aesthetic quality of IDN - the Agency. Already mentioned above, it translates into the rewarding ability to carry out actions and see the result of these decisions and choices, and

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<sup>10</sup> MURRAY, J.: *Inventing the medium: Principles of Interaction Design as a Cultural Practice*. London : MIT Press, 2012, p. 9.

<sup>11</sup> MURRAY, J.: Research into Interactive Digital Narrative: A Kaleidoscopic View. In *Interactive Storytelling, 11th International Conference on Interactive Digital Storytelling*. Dublin, Ireland : Springer, 2018, p. 12. [online]. [2020-02-25]. Available at: <[https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-030-04028-4\\_1](https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-030-04028-4_1)>.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> NAKE, F.: Human-computer interaction: signs and signals interfacing. In *Languages of design*, 1994, Vol. 2, No. 2, p. 4. [online]. [2020-02-25]. Available at: <[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/37915572\\_Human-computer\\_interaction\\_Signs\\_and\\_signals\\_interfacing](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/37915572_Human-computer_interaction_Signs_and_signals_interfacing)>.

<sup>14</sup> CARVALHAIS, M.: *Artificial Aesthetics: Creative Practices in Computational Art and Design*. Porto : UPorto Edições, 2016, p. 71.

<sup>15</sup> FOUCAULT, M.: *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*. NY : Pantheon Books, 1980, p. 202.

<sup>16</sup> MURRAY, J.: *Hamlet on the Holodeck: The Future of Narrative in Cyberspace*. New York : Free Press, 1997, p. 13.

<sup>17</sup> JENKINS, K. M.: *Choose your own adventure: interactive narratives and attitude change*. [Dissertation Thesis]. Chapel Hill : University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2014, p. 97.

<sup>18</sup> MURRAY, J.: *Hamlet on the Holodeck: The Future of Narrative in Cyberspace*. New York : Free Press, 1997, p. 99.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 120.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 107.

it „requires two kinds of scripting - coding the actions of the digital system, and cueing the action of the interactor.“<sup>21</sup>

The transformational characteristic of the computer is particularly attractive for IDN. for the freedom they have in showing a set of events that can be changed according to multiple points of view. To this view, Murray calls it the „kaleidoscopic“ approach as a composite made up of fragments and emphasized the creation of coherent multi sequential narrative forms that foster a more sophisticated understanding of systems of behaviour.<sup>22</sup>

Focusing on the aesthetic qualities of interactive digital narratives and converging on an analytical framework motivated from here, we want to effort and demonstrate how these kind of narratives can be a compelling link of communication between the users and the system.

## 2. Methodology

Interactive digital narratives explore the affordances of the digital medium and are reinforced by the ability to allow users to experience the narrative and to feel that their actions have some meaningful effect. Over the last hundred years, the term *interaction* „that described the reciprocal actions that occur primarily in biological, chemical, and physiological processes,“<sup>23</sup> has undergone numerous changes. Christoph Neuberger, quoted in Kwastek,<sup>24</sup> explains that nowadays, interaction is based both on feedback processes and on the cognitive elaboration of those same processes. To this extent, the author states that the fundamental characteristics of the interaction „include real-time exchange and presence, control and feedback, and the selection and interpretation processes.“<sup>25</sup>

Roth and Koenitz<sup>26</sup> decided to evaluate the user experience with IDN in 12 dimensions that they grouped according to the aesthetic qualities of agency, immersion, and transformation.<sup>27</sup> Although they organize the dimensions in this way, the authors reveal that there is a close and inter-relational relationship between them, since, for example, a user who experiences agency, automatically becomes more immersed. This framework, which combines several dimensions related to the user experience with characteristics specific to IDN, allows an analysis of the possible relationships that are created between users and the system itself.

<sup>21</sup> MURRAY, J.: *Hamlet on the Holodeck: The Future of Narrative in Cyberspace*. New York : Free Press, 1997, p. 144.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 169.

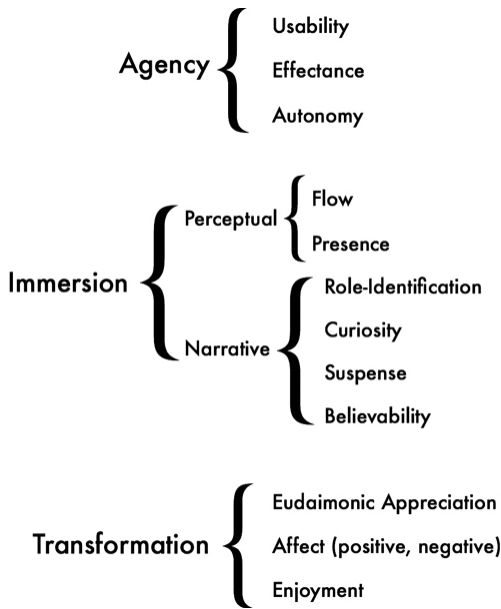
<sup>23</sup> KWASTEK, K.: *Aesthetics of Interaction in Digital Art*. Cambridge, Mass., United States : The MIT Press, 2015, p. 5.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>26</sup> ROTH, C., KOENITZ, H.: Evaluating the user experience of interactive digital narrative. In CHAMBEL, T., KAISER, R., NIAMUT, O., OOI, W. T., REDI, J. R. (eds.): *Proceedings of the 1st International Workshop on Multimedia Alternate Realities*. Amsterdam, The Netherlands : ACM, 2016, p. 32. [online]. [2020-02-25]. Available at: <[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/308986296\\_Evaluating\\_the\\_User\\_Experience\\_of\\_Interactive\\_Digital\\_](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/308986296_Evaluating_the_User_Experience_of_Interactive_Digital_)>.

<sup>27</sup> MURRAY, J.: *Hamlet on the Holodeck: The Future of Narrative in Cyberspace*. New York : Free Press, 1997, p. 13.



**FIGURE 1:** Table showing the dimensions for user experience

Source: ROTH, C., KOENITZ, H.: Evaluating the user experience of interactive digital narrative. In CHAMBEL, T., KAISER, R., NIAMUT, O., OOI, W. T., REDI, J. R. (eds.): *Proceedings of the 1st International Workshop on Multimedia Alternate Realities*. Amsterdam, The Netherlands : ACM, 2016, p. 31-36. [online]. [2020-02-25]. Available at: <[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/308986296\\_Evaluating\\_the\\_User\\_Experience\\_of\\_Interactive\\_Digital\\_](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/308986296_Evaluating_the_User_Experience_of_Interactive_Digital_)>.

In the Agency category, we find the dimensions of Usability, Effectance, and Autonomy. Usability refers to the system itself and the interaction design. In IDN, it mentions to how we construct the interface that will come into contact with the user and, which relates directly to the characteristics of „perceived effectance, autonomy, and satisfaction of the user’s expectations.“<sup>28</sup> The better we consider the Usability, the higher the degree of involvement and reciprocity. Effectance is about the outcome that a given action has on the narrative and the meaning it can have for the story’s progression. It relates directly to Self-Determination Theory, „where people are motivated to pursue actions that satisfy fundamental intrinsic needs for autonomy (sense of volition or willingness when doing a task), competence (the need for challenge and feelings of effectance), and social relatedness (the need to feel in touch with somebody else).“<sup>29</sup> Thus, actions that satisfy these characteristics are highly related to a feeling of belief, and because of this, the authors of the framework distinguish two levels of effectance:

- The Local Effectance where users can view the immediate effects of their actions;
- The Global Effectance has more substantial influence and is highly related to the impact that actions can have on the future of the narrative, and can lead to new situations.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>28</sup> MURRAY, J.: *Hamlet on the Holodeck: The Future of Narrative in Cyberspace*. New York : Free Press, 1997, p. 32.

<sup>29</sup> ROTH, C.: *Experiencing Interactive Storytelling*. [Dissertation Thesis]. Amsterdam : VU University Amsterdam, 2015, p. 40.

<sup>30</sup> ROTH, C., KOENITZ, H.: Evaluating the user experience of interactive digital narrative. In CHAMBEL, T., KAISER, R., NIAMUT, O., OOI, W. T., REDI, J. R. (eds.): *Proceedings of the 1st International Workshop on Multimedia Alternate Realities*. Amsterdam, The Netherlands : ACM, 2016, p. 31-36. [online]. [2020-02-25]. Available at: <[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/308986296\\_Evaluating\\_the\\_User\\_Experience\\_of\\_Interactive\\_Digital\\_](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/308986296_Evaluating_the_User_Experience_of_Interactive_Digital_)>.

Autonomy is highly related to the independence of choosing within a series of options, without the feeling of being pulled in a single direction. This dimension promotes a more engaging and realistic world that leads proportionally to a higher perception of immersion. However, it can be problematic, too, since more Autonomy does not always result in enjoyable experiences.<sup>31</sup>

The quality of immersion is divided into two types: perceptual immersion (Flow and Presence) and narrative immersion (Role-identification, Believability, Curiosity, Suspense). Flow is accomplished „if a state in the middle between boredom and anxiety occurs. Tasks that are perceived as being too easy and not challenging can lead to disinterest and boredom, while tasks, which are too tricky, can evoke frustration and stress.“<sup>32</sup> Therefore the users experiencing flow are genuinely engaged in their activity, and they feel immersed in their participatory activities, causing them to experience the sense of Presence in the story world. Consequently, Presence describes the sense of being present in a simulated world, which indicates being involved, like they were transported inside the narrative and absorbed by the content and feelings that they are representing.<sup>33</sup>

In the other kind of immersion, the narrative one, Believability, „refers to the active creation of belief that requires a reactive environment in which the interactor experiences agency, while the narrative evolves in a plausible way and characters react in a credible manner.“<sup>34</sup> The Role-Identification characteristic is about identifying with a virtual character and the feeling of being anyone and can generate states like reduce self- discrepancies and increase self-esteem.<sup>35</sup> Curiosity is related to the capability to produce and support users' interest in the narrative and is considered a profound emotional state with the impact of retaining the user in the IDN experience for longer.<sup>36</sup> Relate with Curiosity is Suspense, defined by conflicting emotional components, such as states of anxiety or stress. Nevertheless, the dimension of Suspense is achieved when we follow the previous states by a secure experience of relief and satisfaction or even sadness.<sup>37</sup>

Lastly, concerning the qualities aesthetics of transformation, we have three dimensions: Eudaimonic Appreciation, Positive and Negative Affect, and Enjoyment. Eudaimonic Appreciation is „the link that connects the aesthetic presentation to a personal dimension and its pleasurable experience, which manifests itself in a sensory way, evoked by the image, music, camera angles, narrative style, the narrative content or the characters.“<sup>38</sup> While Positive Affect is connected to gratification, the Negative Affect can have a double meaning. For example, something sad can be seen as the best for the narrative itself. Finally, Enjoyment is the most general dimension and is associated with a feeling of positive experience and emotion. This experience can be related to the phenomenon of play that is driven by curiosity and make-belief.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>31</sup> ROTH, C.: *Experiencing Interactive Storytelling*. [Dissertation Thesis]. Amsterdam : VU University Amsterdam, 2015, p. 69.

<sup>32</sup> ROTH, C., KOENITZ, H.: Evaluating the user experience of interactive digital narrative. In CHAMBEL, T., KAISER, R., NIAMUT, O., OOI, W. T., REDD, J. R. (eds.): *Proceedings of the 1st International Workshop on Multimedia Alternate Realities*. Amsterdam, The Netherlands : ACM, 2016, p. 33. [online]. [2020-02-25]. Available at: <[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/308986296\\_Evaluating\\_the\\_User\\_Experience\\_of\\_Interactive\\_Digital\\_](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/308986296_Evaluating_the_User_Experience_of_Interactive_Digital_)>.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 33.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 34.

<sup>35</sup> ROTH, C.: *Experiencing Interactive Storytelling*. [Dissertation Thesis]. Amsterdam : VU University Amsterdam, 2015, p. 77.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 46.

<sup>37</sup> ROTH, C., KOENITZ, H.: Evaluating the user experience of interactive digital narrative. In CHAMBEL, T., KAISER, R., NIAMUT, O., OOI, W. T., REDD, J. R. (eds.): *Proceedings of the 1st International Workshop on Multimedia Alternate Realities*. Amsterdam, The Netherlands : ACM, 2016, p. 34. [online]. [2020-02-25]. Available at: <[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/308986296\\_Evaluating\\_the\\_User\\_Experience\\_of\\_Interactive\\_Digital\\_](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/308986296_Evaluating_the_User_Experience_of_Interactive_Digital_)>.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 35.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 35.



Therefore, and through a minimal empirical analysis, we will evaluate the interactive movie *Bandersnatch*<sup>40</sup> and analyze how these dimensions are present in this IDN. The objective is to understand whether the presence of dimensions that enable agency, immersion, and transformation, provide changes in the relationship between user and system, enabling new forms of interpretation with the subject and the represented work.

### 3. Results

*Bandersnatch*<sup>41</sup> is an episode of the „*Black Mirror*“ series that was presented by Netflix. The action takes place in the 1980s, in the United Kingdom, and focuses on the narrative of a game developer aspirant.



PICTURE 1: *Bandersnatch* poster (2018)

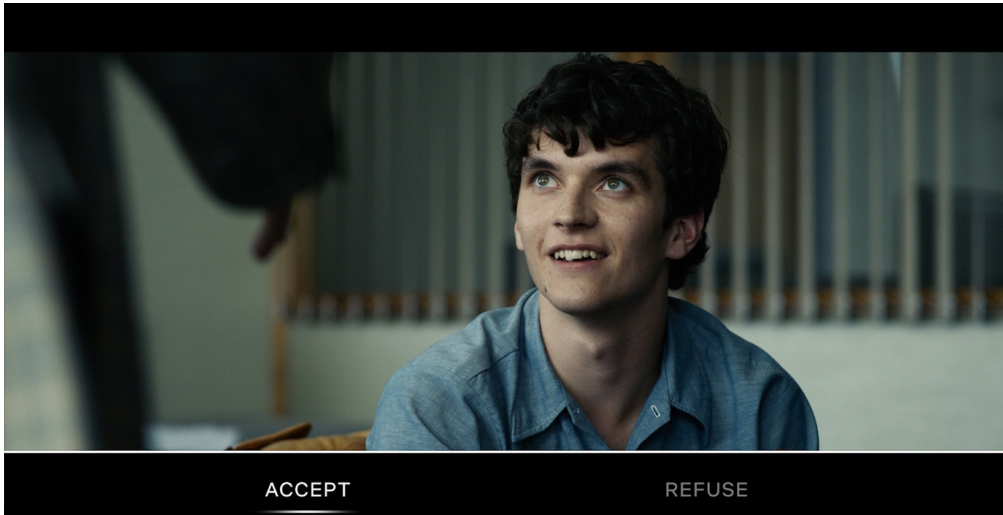
Source: Screenshot, *Bandersnatch*, 2018

The audience has control over some crucial decisions during the episode, implemented through the choice between two text options. It is also possible to watch the narrative without any interaction since one of the two options is chosen automatically after a specified duration. Additionally, there is also an invitation to repeat, which allows us to revisit decisions and find paths and results that were not discovered at first sight. These various paths expose some of the themes of the narrative, such as psychological issues, violence, and death. The user also has the option to reach most of the endings that the narrative proposes without having to start from the beginning. He can merely choose which interaction he wants to return to, allowing him to return to the crucial moments that make new choices and paths possible. Also, „*throughout the film, viewers' choices are shaped by their: esthetic preferences (e.g., choice of music), consumption preferences (e.g., choice of breakfast cereal), backgrounds (e.g., older viewers may experience nostalgia for the early adventure and computer games while younger viewers might regard the film as a period drama full of quaint obsolescence), contextual information (e.g., if viewers*

<sup>40</sup> *Bandersnatch*. 2018. [online]. [2020-02-20]. Available at: <<https://www.netflix.com/pt/title/80988062>>.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

have previously watched the *Black Mirror* episodes and are aware of its dystopian themes), and technological affordances (e.g., having access to and being able to use a smartphone, a tablet, a laptop, a smart TV, or a video game console on which the film can play).<sup>442</sup>



PICTURE 2: *Bandersnatch* frame (2018)

Source: Screenshot, *Bandersnatch*, 2018

Roth and Koenitz<sup>43</sup> conducted an audience reaction study based on the framework analyzed in this context, to 32 students from an interactive narrative seminar at the University of the Arts Utrecht (HKU). The results showed a positive reaction for usability and the impact on the narrative's progression, both at a local and global level. For the simple fact that the choice is only possible in two options, the relationship with autonomy is weak, and it also did not convince users from perceptual immersion. One of the reasons for this may be the fact that the role-identification dimension had the lowest value of all dimensions, showing once again that they are interrelated, and if one presents a low representation, it can automatically decrease the possibility of manifesting other dimensions.

On the other hand, believability, suspense, and curiosity were both positively positioned, showing the possibility of users being interested and excited by the narrative. After the *Bandersnatch* experience, the authors found users in a more positive than a negative state, constituting a sign of enjoyment and eudaimonic appreciation. It is possible to perceive that the positive experience and the relationship of general understanding they had with the narrative itself show the relevance of the transformational power and meaning of IDN, just as the demonstrated agency is a sign of better relations between user and system.

Focusing on these results, we will now discuss in specific and do a close reading about this interactive digital narrative.

<sup>42</sup> EL NAHLA, N.: *Black Mirror: Bandersnatch and how Netflix manipulates us, the new gods*. In *Consumption Markets & Culture*, 2019, Vol. 22, p. 2. [online]. [2020-03-15]. Available at: <[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/335172351\\_Black\\_Mirror\\_Bandersnatch\\_and\\_how\\_Netflix\\_manipulates\\_us\\_the\\_new\\_gods](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/335172351_Black_Mirror_Bandersnatch_and_how_Netflix_manipulates_us_the_new_gods)>.

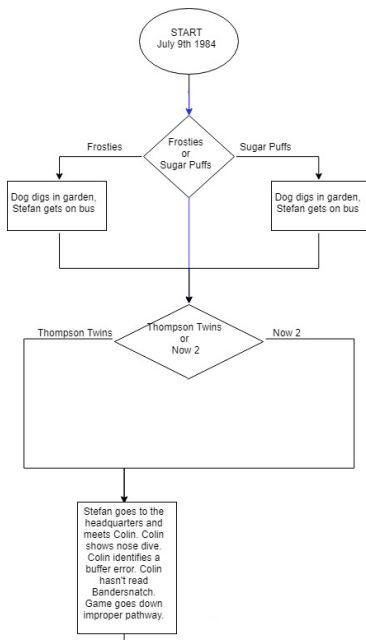
<sup>43</sup> ROTH, C., KOENITZ, H.: *Bandersnatch, yea or nay? Reception and user experience of an interactive digital narrative video*. In *Proceedings of the 2019 ACM International Conference on Interactive Experiences for TV and Online Video*. Salford (Manchester) United Kingdom : ACM, 2019, p. 250. [online]. [2020-02-15]. Available at: <[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/335392016\\_Bandersnatch\\_Yea\\_or\\_Nay\\_Reception\\_and\\_User\\_Experience\\_of\\_an\\_Interactive\\_Digital\\_Narrative\\_Video](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/335392016_Bandersnatch_Yea_or_Nay_Reception_and_User_Experience_of_an_Interactive_Digital_Narrative_Video)>.

## 4. Discussion

When analyzing this framework, we do not intend to quantify the dimensions that may or may not be present in the IDN that we propose to observe. We instead want to understand how these dimensions are manifest through the narrative and the characteristics that they exhibit, becoming able to perpetuate the relationship between user and system when they provide an experience based on the attendance of elements in the categories of Agency, Immersion, and Transformation.

The variation in the duration of the experience with *Bandersnatch* can take between 40 and 90 minutes, making it possible to predict the variations that may exist during the narrative. It all starts on July 9, 1984, with the presentation of the main character - Stefan - waking up and taking pills pointing in a direction that indicates some psychological problems. He meets his father in the kitchen and tells him about the meeting he has at a video game company where he will present his game. *Bandersnatch* is based on a book by Jerome F. Davies, which belonged to his mother and which we soon realize is not present in his life.

In the next few minutes, we will be presented with the first interactions. The first is for the choice of cereals the protagonist prefers for breakfast, and the second is about the music Stefan will hear on the bus trip to the meeting. Both interactions do not influence any variation from a narrative point of view; however, they are not devoid of meaning. The choice of cereals later affects the TV commercial that Stefan watches. The choice of music not only decides Colin Ritman's musical preferences - a critical character - but also decides the soundtrack that will accompany the rest of the story. Therefore, although insignificant, they determine some characteristics of the plot. They represent an intention to adapt the user to the system, showing them how to navigate with the keyboard, how to use the mouse, contributing to a good usability experience and interaction design. However, and for a viewer who is not aware of these issues, these first two interactions leave us thinking about the real effect that our choices may have on narrative progression, and may even be seen with some frustration or boredom since we have the perception that nothing changes.



**FIGURE 2** *Bandersnatch* flowchart showing the two first interactions

Source: Screenshot, reddit.com, 15.03.2020.

Moving forward, Stefan has a meeting with the CEO of Tuckersoft to present his game. He meets Colin Ritman, another video game creator and one of his greatest idols. The CEO invites him to program his game in the company, and we are presented with the third interaction that is based on „accept“ or „refuse.“ If we accept, we are immediately transported to the beginning of the narrative and arriving at the same point, we are obliged to refuse the job offer. Once again, we are faced with some frustration and lack of autonomy because by casually guiding users to a „right“ answer or offering a „Back“ button, Netflix takes away the possibility of feeling independent.

The fourth interaction is in the office of Dr<sup>a</sup>. Haynes, the protagonist's therapist. She questions if he wants to talk about what happened with his Mom. By choosing yes, we are led to revisit an episode of Stefan when he was five years old and where we understand the cause of his mother's death and the guilt he feels, as well as his anger towards his father. These are essential points, which make us understand the choices we are forced to make later, „inspired by a type of interactivity that wants to reproduce the interaction between two human beings.“<sup>44</sup>

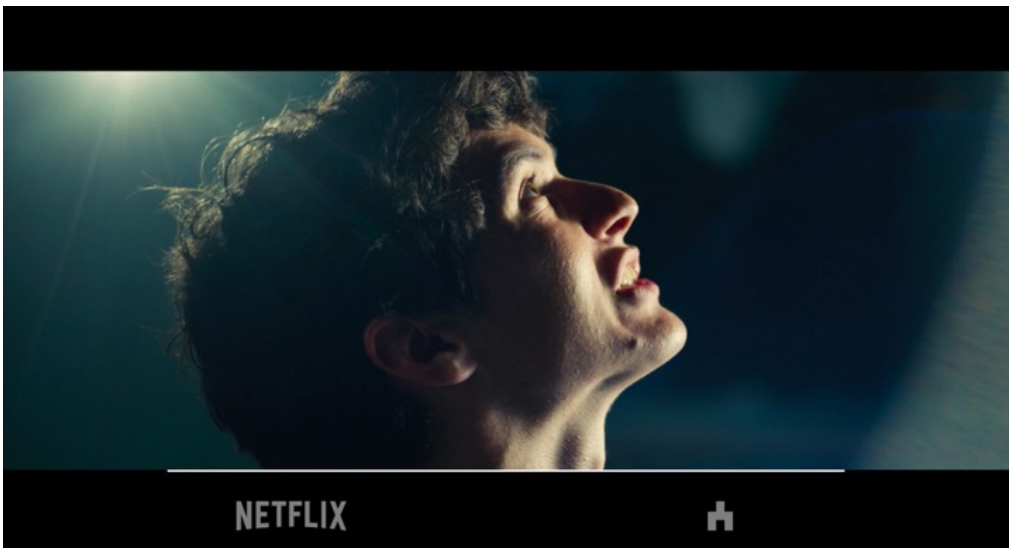
In this first part of the presentation of all the characters in the narrative, we feel obliged to choose a path, so the feeling of agency, immersion, and transformation is rather reduced. However, „the audience is introduced into the diegetic world represented on the screen, creating a hybrid object with an ambiguous ontological nature, interplaying the position of spectator and character.“<sup>45</sup> Moreover, although these factors serve to increase the role-identification with the character, it does not happen on a large scale.

As the narrative continues, the interactions that follow also begin to be more complex and to have repercussions in the way they present different meanings, which result in multiple outcomes. Consequently, almost every other decision the viewer has to make, drastically, affects the plot, covering „issues of authorial control, government conspiracies, murder, suicide, paranoia, madness, fate, free will and failure/success,“<sup>46</sup> providing the viewer with ten different endings. However, only five of them represent significant variations. Some are well resolved; others are inconclusive, forcing users to go back and try another different option to continue with the plot. For example, when Stefan's father invites him to lunch, we have the option to choose between „Throw Tea over Computer“ or „Yell at Dad.“ By choosing the first option, all of Stefan's work is lost, and this partly results in the end of the story. However, the narrative continues to the moments before this interaction appears and forces us to choose „Yell at Dad“ so that we can continue the plot. Once again, it contributes to a weak relationship with autonomy. Also, in two other possible endings, the producer takes a metaphorical control. When Stefan demands an answer to the question „Who is in control?“, one of the possible answers is „Netflix,“ leading to yet another possibility where Stefan sees himself in the recordings of the *Bandersnatch* episode itself, abruptly breaking with reality and the intentions that were being created.

44 GAUDENZ, S.: *The Living Documentary: from representing reality to co-creating reality in digital interactive documentary*. [Dissertation Thesis]. Goldsmiths : University of London, 2013, p. 41.

45 NOGUEIRA, P.: *INTERACTIVE AUDIENCES: viewers\users' engagement in National Film Board of Canada's interactive documentaries*. [Dissertation Thesis]. Porto : University of Porto, 2018, p. 209.

46 EL NAHLA, N.: Black Mirror: Bandersnatch and how Netflix manipulates us, the new gods. In *Consumption Markets & Culture*, 2019, Vol. 22, p. 2. [online]. [2020-03-15]. Available at: <[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/335172351\\_Black\\_Mirror\\_Bandersnatch\\_and\\_how\\_Netflix\\_manipulates\\_us\\_the\\_new\\_gods](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/335172351_Black_Mirror_Bandersnatch_and_how_Netflix_manipulates_us_the_new_gods)>.



PICTURE 3: *Bandersnatch* frame (2018)

Source: Screenshot, *Bandersnatch*, 2018

On the other hand, interactions like „*Visit Dr. Haynes*“ or „*Follow Colin*“ result in entirely different narratives contributing to the positive relationship that users felt with the local and global effect, as well as believability, suspense, and curiosity. Here Stefan may die, or he may just be dreaming, and everything ends well, with the game being released and well received by the critics, for example.



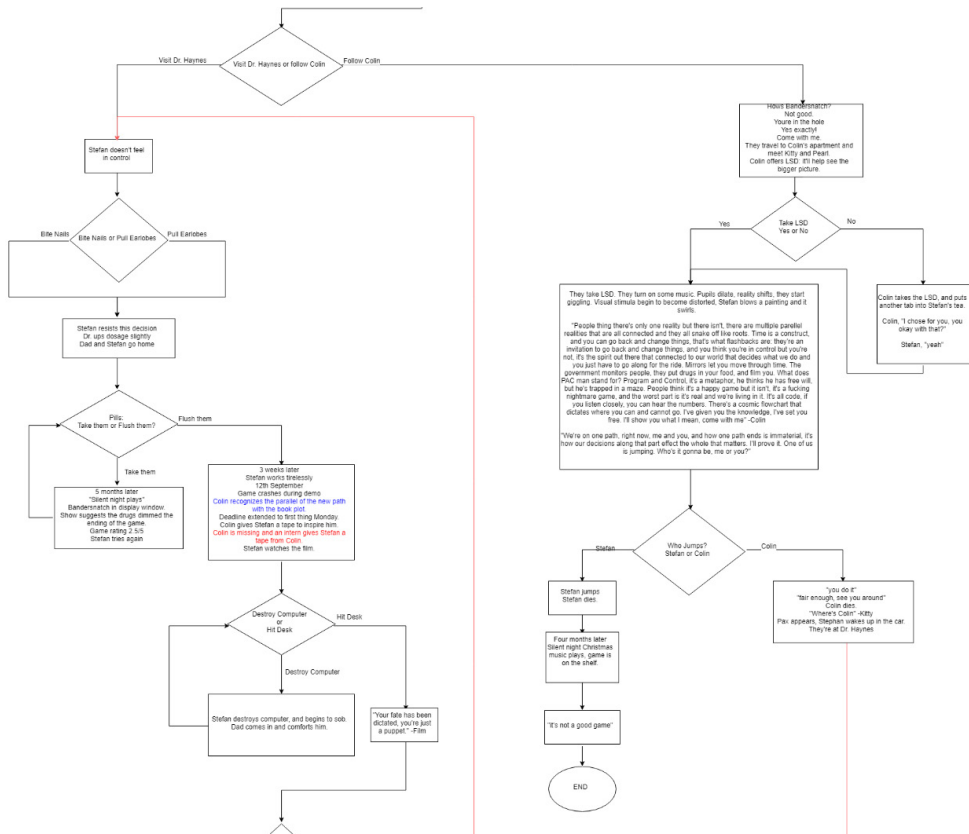
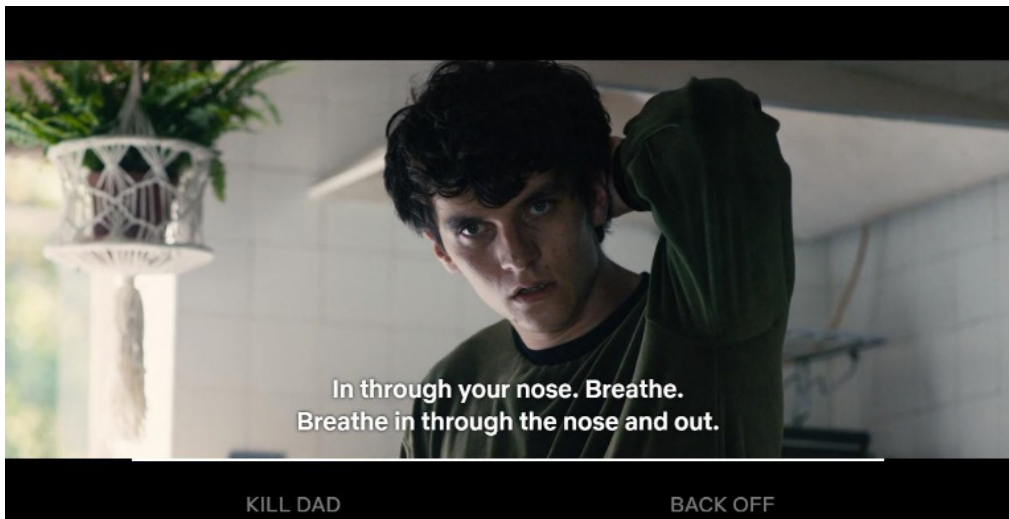


FIGURE 3: *Bandersnatch* flowchart

Source: Screenshot, reddit.com, 15.03.2020

Not being happy with any of these endings, we can try other different things, and although in one of them we are forced to kill Stefan's father, giving us no other possibility, the feeling of enjoyment is positive because of the relationship we have been building with the narrative until we get here.



PICTURE 4: *Bandersnatch* frame (2018)

Source: Screenshot, *Bandersnatch*, 2018

Although *Bandersnatch* is not concerning any social or cultural perspective, it is a project about personal thoughts and memories that serve to create a set of fragments of human emotions and reflections<sup>47</sup> - Eudaimonic Appreciation and Positive or Negative Affect. A general Enjoyment is associated, in this case, with the characteristic of play and to be part of this movement, leading through a cathartic transformation.<sup>48</sup>

## 5. Conclusions

Interactive digital narratives constitute an expressive and emerging form, based on procedural rules and presenting a cognitive function, which is reproduced in a variety of ways, being a „*forgiving, flexible cognitive frame for constructing, communicating, and reconstructing mentally projected worlds.*“<sup>49</sup> They offer a dramatic agency, giving to the IDN the ability to influence the development of characters, the sequence of events or even the final result, and can be interactive videos, museum installations, location-based games, electronic literature, or augmented reality,<sup>50</sup> among others.

We have decided to analyze the new readings incited in the relationship between subject and system, which can arise from the aesthetic qualities of Agency, Immersion, and Transformation presented in the IDN.

When a user engages with the *system*, a *process* is created, with a form defined by the actions carried out by the user, as well as the opportunities given by the *system*. The resulting *product* describes the different results that come from the same source (*system*) through the

<sup>47</sup> KWASTEK, K.: *Aesthetics of Interaction in Digital Art*. Cambridge, Mass., United States : The MIT Press, 2015, p. 254.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 259.

<sup>49</sup> HERMAN, D.: *Story logic: Problems and possibilities of narrative*. Lincoln : University of Nebraska Press, 2004, p. 49.

<sup>50</sup> MURRAY, J.: Research into Interactive Digital Narrative: A Kaleidoscopic View. In CARDONA-RIVIERA, R. E., SULLIVAN, A., YOUNG, R. M. (eds.): *Interactive Storytelling, 11th International Conference on Interactive Digital Storytelling*. Little Cottonwood Canyon, UT, USA : Springer, Cham, 2018, p. 14. [online]. [2020-02-25]. Available at: <[https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-030-04028-4\\_1](https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-030-04028-4_1)>.

participatory process. Hence, IDN assume interaction in which a participant engages with the computer program to produce the *output*.<sup>51</sup>

*„The resulting product of interactive digital narrative — a single walkthrough — represents an instantiated narrative. Given the participatory process and the procedural nature of IDN, very different narrative products can originate from the same system—any concrete product represents only one particular instantiation.“*<sup>52</sup>

The aim of this *output* is fundamentally a question of language and not any kind of language but the specific language utilized by developers and users.<sup>53</sup> This way is not only made of words and programming conventions but also personal desires, prejudices, cultural assumptions, and social beliefs.

Nonetheless, in this cultural-technological approach, any physical device or psychological characteristic positioned between the user and the digital environment, provide by McLuhan's<sup>54</sup> vision, an extension to the human body, in which “the user experiences a transforming encounter with the world via the direct experience and interpretation of the technology itself”.<sup>55</sup> Regardless, and according to the post phenomenological approach, it is possible to explore the relationship between body and technology and how the latter induces bodily experiences of interacting with it and, consequently, shapes how the human beings perceive the world.<sup>56</sup>

Additionally, they reflect upon one another - new modes of communication and intersubjectivity. Intersubjectivity is a reflexive operation and a process whereby *„the audience shifts between subjective and objective states, and in the first place, it was defined as interactions that happen between two or more human beings in the physical world.“*<sup>57</sup> However, they started to be also studied as exchanges that occur between the conscious agents of the work (primarily characters, but in whichever form they take), and between the interlocutor and those same agents (which is also, in essence, interaction with the creator).<sup>58</sup> We understand this meaning-making process from a cognitive perspective, where narratologies such Herman, Bordwell or Marie-Laure Ryan said that the process of giving meaning to a narrative is a cognitive construct, or mental image, built by the interpreter in response to the narrative construct.<sup>59</sup>

Since the felt perceptual and narrative immersion, the control and autonomy over the actions taken, as well as the responsibility and the meaningful and pleasant relationship built with the object, IDN are a vehicle of influence in future behaviours that promote a different scheme of representations, capable of helping to overcome antagonisms.

<sup>51</sup> KOENITZ, H.: Design Approaches for Interactive Digital Narrative. In SCHOENAU-FOG, H., BRUNI, L. E., LOUCHAR, S., BACEVICIUTE, S. (eds.): *International Conference on Interactive Digital Storytelling*. Copenhagen, Denmark : Springer, Cham, 2015, p. 98. [online]. [2020-03-05]. Available at: <[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/289522985\\_Design\\_Approaches\\_for\\_Interactive\\_Digital\\_Narrative](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/289522985_Design_Approaches_for_Interactive_Digital_Narrative)>.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 98.

<sup>53</sup> CRAMER, F.: *The Creative common misunderstanding*. [online]. [2020-03-17]. Available at: <[https://noemalab.eu/org/sections/ideas/ideas\\_articles/pdf/cramer\\_cc\\_misunderstanding.pdf](https://noemalab.eu/org/sections/ideas/ideas_articles/pdf/cramer_cc_misunderstanding.pdf)>.

<sup>54</sup> MCLUHAN, M.: *Understanding media: the extensions of man*. Massachusetts : MIT Press, 1994, p. 3.

<sup>55</sup> ROSENBERGER, R., VERBEEK, P. P.: *Postphenomenological investigations: essays on human-technology relations*. Lanham, MD : Lexington Books, 2015, p. 17.

<sup>56</sup> IHDE, D.: *Technology and the Lifeworld: From Garden to Earth*. Bloomington : Indiana University Press, 1990, p. 77.

<sup>57</sup> PRUS, R. C.: *Symbolic interaction and ethnographic research: Intersubjectivity and the study of human lived experience*. NY : SUNY Press, 1996, p. 106.

<sup>58</sup> MERLO, S.: *Narrative, Story, Intersubjectivity: Formulating a Continuum for Examining Transmedia Storytelling*. [Dissertation Thesis]. Australia : Murdoch University, 2014, p. 104.

<sup>59</sup> ROTH, C., VAN NUENEN, T., KOENITZ, H.: Ludonarrative Hermeneutics: A Way Out and the Narrative Paradox. In ROUSE? R., KOENITZ, H., HAAHR, M. (eds.): *Interactive Storytelling - 11th International Conference on Interactive Digital Storytelling*. Dublin, Ireland : Springer, Cham, 2018, p. 7. [online]. [2020-02-25]. Available at: <[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/329066643\\_Ludonarrative\\_Hermeneutics\\_A\\_Way\\_Out\\_and\\_the\\_Narrative\\_Paradox](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/329066643_Ludonarrative_Hermeneutics_A_Way_Out_and_the_Narrative_Paradox)>.

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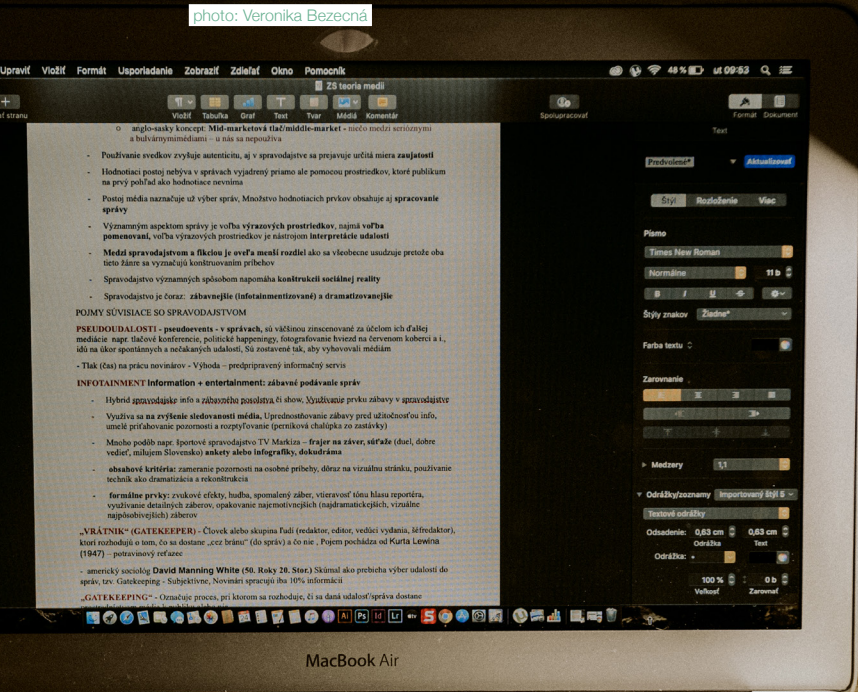


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# The Cyberjournalism That We Make And The One That We Want – Cyberjournalistic Praxis: The Case Of Mass Media In Matanzas, Cuba

## ABSTRACT

The present work characterizes the hypermedia communication's features of mass media in Matanzas, Cuba: TV Yumurí, Radio 26 and the Editorial Girón. The study takes an approach, from the academy, to the cyberjournalistic praxis, describing professional practices, self-regulation and application of knowledge. A group of theoretical considerations around hypermedia resources are proposed in order to improve the digital journalism that we do. The communicology study integrates technical resources of quantitative and qualitative levels. It also considers policy documents, reflections of academics and legitimizing agents to analyze the assessments of their own social development. The main findings point to the heterogeneity, uneven development and fragmentation of cyber-journalistic wasting of the communicative potentialities that provides Internet, such as its hypertextuality, the interactivity and its multimodality.

## KEY WORDS

Hypertextuality. Interactivity. Multimodality. Cyberjournalism.

# 1. Introduction

The Internet has opened in front of our eyes as the biggest space for cultural interchange that mankind has ever had. The hallucinating world of the bits, the software and the connections has impacted each fragment of society, economy, religions, policy, arts and sciences. Not even the most sceptical have escaped from the transformations landslide of the Web.

It has had such an impact, that the new logic established for the world of bits, software and connections has transformed information in something immaterial that, according to the Spanish journalist Ignacio Ramonet, „now takes the form of a fluid that circulates in open segments for the Web almost at light speed.“<sup>1</sup>

With this phenomenon's arrival, universal journalism begins to redefine its format and its way to produce news. Journalism's incorporation to the Internet, from the 90's decade to the present time, configures an accelerated evolution process that has been accompanied, since its genesis, by a wide debate in relation to the transformations. The professionals needed to rethink the conceptions of what should be a better communicative product.

Journalists have seen themselves immersed in the constant renewal that the Internet has propitiated as a support, media and communication channel. Productive processes, professional roles, language, materials presentation and established relations between emission and reception, are some of the adjustments that journalistic activity has had.

The essential features of communication in the Web – hypertextuality, multimediality and interactivity- implicate journalism differently than the one of the traditional Media. Now it can be more open and flexible, immediate, of complex structures. The theoretical reflection around the internet has not finished yet, it's still evolving, feeding off the contributions of media academics and those who day-by-day labour with them.

While the mass communication medias try winning authenticity through legitimization on the World Wide Web, personnel implicated in the hypermedia production process respond to particular performance rules in the subjective and labour order. These rules and standards are called productive routines and professional ideologies, and both are interrelated and integrated in the journalistic production process, forming the professional culture of digital.

In many instances that process occurs in an impure context, because it gestates itself in non-exclusively virtual spaces, but convergent with traditional ones, this is the case of mass media in Matanzas, Cuba (TV Yumurí, Radio 26 and Editorial Girón). In these cases on the day-by-day professional stage structured practices, coexisting with emerging ones. Besides, it is necessary to bear in mind that various contributing factors other than these traditional Medias enjoy public recognition. With this study we intend to take a look at the hypermedia communication made today by the principal media of communication in Matanzas's province, Cuba.

## 2. Theoretical Reflections

### 2.1 Cyberjournalistic language

*„Nothing occurs without the language.“*  
Fernando Flores

Since journalists live together with (and in) the Internet, informative research and diffusion have evolved from the roots. Communication professional profiles, productive routines in the media and the audience have experienced substantial metamorphosis. In these surroundings

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<sup>1</sup> RAMONET, I.: *La explosión del periodismo. De los medios de masas a la masa de medios*. La Habana, Cuba : Editorial José Martí, 2011, p. 6.

becomes inevitable the transformation of the main journalistic tool to reach the public: language; it plays a primary role in positioning, easy access and user permanence online. That's why in cybermedia what you say is as important as how you do it.

Regarding this matter, numerous researchers agree on the importance of using on the web traditional paradigms and recommend a simple, direct and precise language; also to avoid abuse in the extension of publications, try not to use big blocks of texts, and also not use too long video or audio extracts, or too heavy for the digital support that will be used. The three basic pillars that hold cyberjournalistic language are hypertextuality, interactivity and multimediality. These characteristics conjugated among them create a hypermedia message highly impregnated with the best of the preceding Medias, conceived not as a simple movement toward the Web, but a creation for it.

## 2.2 Hypertextuality: The grammar of the Web

Hypertextuality is the ability to interconnect various digital texts among themselves; they can be written or audiovisual. This feature not only has revolutionized the ways to produce and organize information, but also the way to read it.

In the digital environment, users find a communicative product that provides them „freedom“ to jump from one text to another following reader wishes and intuitions. Hypertextuality gives to Internet users control of their actions on the web and through it may be able to trace a navigation route toward knowledge and create their own narrations. Likewise expressed Salaverría - the simple fact that to insert links in texts he is not enough to create a hyper-textual narrative.<sup>2</sup>

The cyberjournalist has the responsibility to provide to users' effective access routes to knowledge: through links to sites of sources that improve information, connecting users with the main characters of events or even giving them the chance to contribute with relevant information about events. The journalist must act as a guiding compass of information for the user finds their way through huge amount of data, imagery or videos. The freedom that the Internet user has to decide what to read and which the path will be, reveals one of the most important features of the Internet: hypertextuality.

## 2.3 Interactivity: The taking of the Web by users

With the tool of interactivity, the user discovers and performs a much more active participation in the world wide web, because the reader not only can select content to examine and consider, but also can Exchange with the media through comments, and with other readers using the tools of social medias or discussion forums. Interactivity subverts the traditional communication model turning a receiver of contents into an emitter.

According to researcher Mariano Cebrián, „it settles as a multidimensional process that goes from the aspects of technological mediations to the multimedia expression. Through interactivity, cybermedias and users modify their relations. The conception of traditional journalistic information is increased with the added value of other dimensions stuck to individual and group matters. Others ways of narration and expressiveness are incorporated.“<sup>3</sup>

However, this characteristic of the web is not exploited widely by digital medias and real participation of the receivers in communicative processes - it's still an unresolved matter.

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<sup>2</sup> SALAVERRÍA, R.: *Redacción Periodística en Internet*. La Habana, Cuba : Pablo de la Torriente Brau, 2005, p. 64.

<sup>3</sup> CEBRIÁN, P.: Comunicación interactiva en los cibermedios. In *Comunicar. Revista Científica de Educomunicación*, 2009, Vol. 17, No. 33, p. 18.

Nowadays its use depends on the interests of cybermedia to promote users' interaction in some content and include them in the construction of communicative products that allow them to raise their audience ratings and develop legitimization strategies.

## 2.4 Multimediality: Converging in the Web

Multimediality is the ability to combine all of the communicative codes of printed, radial and television Medias in the same support. Thanks to the possibility of cohabitation of text, images and sound in the same product, new spaces have emerged on the web integrating those elements in an original way and at the same time journalistic language has been re-formed and improved starting from the countless possibilities that, individually provides each one of them.

According to the journalist and professor Liliam Marrero multimediality „*notably increases the expressive potentiality of informative products on the Internet, giving messages multimediatic richness that favors higher sharpness in the contents and stimulates deeper analysis.*“<sup>4</sup> With multimediality's arrival a more complete construction of sense is gained, able to lead the users' sight to a particular kind of information, depending on the benefit that can be made from its potentialities. For this it is necessary to direct thoughts towards real integration among all existing formats, more than just to coexistence and juxtaposition among them.

## 3. Mass media in Matanzas, Cuba

### 3.1 Editorial Girón: From ink to bytes

The need of the Editorial Girón to spread its messages all over the world speeded up the appearance in cyberspace of the editorial's first website, on May 12<sup>th</sup>, 2000. Since then, the editorial has had the huge challenge of keep running three editorial tasks: the printed Girón newspaper, the supplement Humedal del Sur (South's Swamp) and the digital newspaper. Even without the basic conditions and with the lack of staff, the first editorial's website that it had static and produced in Dreamweaver, had a daily update, although its journalistic jobs were a faithful copy of the printed newspaper jobs, occurring then as what is known as „*dump journalism.*“ Giron.co.cu went through different stages of development always seeking to achieve better positioning and more interactivity with users. In 2009 it became the first dynamic website in Matanzas province, and in 2012 moved to free software with a more attractive design, new sections and participation forms. Gisela Varela Cárdenas, in charge of digital staff by then explains that in this dynamic website users had more possibilities offered by the web environment, among others: to comment, to access previous editions, journalist blogs and opinions sections. Today the Girón website doesn't have many of the possibilities mentioned previously, this makes it difficult to strengthen bonds with cybernauts because of the lack of a programmer to maintain the website. Its URL is [www.giron.cu](http://www.giron.cu)

Girón web shares some of its contents on Facebook and Twitter, promoting in this way Internet users participation. According to Gisela Varela „*the web page gives priority to communicate the everyday life and reality of Matanzas province first, but without ignoring high impact information in the national and international public opinion.*“<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> MARRERO, L.: *Género de géneros y otras redimensiones. Acercamiento al reportaje multimedia del periodismo digital actual.* [Dissertation Thesis]. Havana : Communication Faculty, University of Havana, 2007, p. 25.

<sup>5</sup> MARTINEZ, A.: *Acercamiento a la cultura profesional de periodistas en las lógicas de producción hipermedia del sitio web de la Editora Girón.* [Dissertation Thesis]. Matanzas : Humanistic and Social Sciences Faculty, University of Matanzas, 2016, p. 28.



Nowadays the Digital Staff is formed by a chief of staff, a journalist that works as editor and reporter, a social network manager and a computer specialist. All the journalistic staff of the editorial supports the website with journalistic jobs. Most of them are young people.

### 3.2 Radio 26: your heart's radio on the Web

In 2004 the web page of Radio 26 appeared in cyberspace for the first time, supported on a static platform and created with pretty basic means, but with the main purpose of showing the world the province's everyday events. After the creation of Radio 26's first web page, reporters gradually joined web work, without having the rudimentary experience about communicative practices on the Internet, hypermedia and hypertextual languages. It was necessary to organize different courses for learning and training. For a few years work was done on the same system until 2008 when it changed to be a dynamic web on the platform (CMS) of Joomla; it allowed incorporating journalists directly into the system as authors and editors of their publications.

For five years the radio station obtained considerable achievements in relation to the number of users and improvements to the website. In 2011 and 2012 after constant modifications and improvement of the website, the digital version of Radio 26 was among the first visited Cuban sites, according to international statistics. In 2013 the web site migrated to a new platform with the purpose of improving work and gaining access to the technological development of the world. Its URL is [www.radio26.cu](http://www.radio26.cu). Today Radio 26 transmits in real time on the Internet. It has a digital editorial staff, a chief and two editor journalists. All the journalists of traditional media (Radio 26) send contents to the web site, along with collaborators of other Medias. The site has profiles on Facebook and Twitter.

### 3.3 TV Yumurí on the Web

TV Yumurí's arrival to the virtual space occurred in 2002, according to its general manager Ángel Tápanes. Most of the journalists didn't have much knowledge about digital journalism resources, and there weren't specialized personnel either, such as a web editor. This first digital experience was developed using the digital pages editor Dreamweaver version 4.

The site included a description of each municipality of Matanzas province with demographic and geographic data, also the nine legends of Matanzas; news divided by sectors, for instance, cultural, sports, economics, historical, etcetera; there weren't national or international sections, it was only about the province. The distinctive hallmark of Matanzas identity was the main quality of that journalistic web, when it opened a fragment of the musical play Yumurí of the Cuban musician Eduardo Sánchez de Fuentes was heard, the theme that identifies the Matanzas TV Channel. The spaces for the programs, back then, appeared on the site in the form of technical specifications; it contained the formal characteristics of the space, schedule, three photos illustrating the host or hostess, the identifying image and the program's presentation.

The journalist Roberto Pérez-Betancourt elaborated the editorial profile when he went to work there, as well as the writing regulations and the web style; he also brought in national and international news. He worked there as writer and editor of the site. From Dreamweaver the digital site moved to the Joomla system for content management. On this platform the site showed a new image. With the arrival of the current webmaster that has a great knowledge about matters of the digital world, since September 2013 the website migrated to the software WordPress, because the editorial team considered it as a very safe platform that provides



lots of opportunities to the journalistic work. The access to the web is through the link: [www.tvyumuri.icrt.cu/](http://www.tvyumuri.icrt.cu/). Informative sources are: exclusive journalistic works of editors, reporters and writers of TV Yumurí, reports from press agencies, mainly from Prensa Latina and AIN; reports from other press agencies, journalistic works published for other Cuban sites edited according the design and editorial profile of the TV Yumurí web site. The site could also be found on Facebook, Twitter and Youtube.

## 4. Methodology

The research was made under the qualitative paradigm. According to its depth it is descriptive exploratory. It was made following the multiple cases design. Some of the empirical methods used were standardized observation, not participating, field and open observation. A questionnaire was applied to journalists to search essential aspects of their interpretation about the studied phenomenon. Methodological triangulation was made from the utilization of different methods and techniques.

Also used were techniques such as documentary or bibliographic research to study the theme precedents, define it and define the directions research should follow. Also used were in depth interviews and semi-standardized and individual interviews with media managers, as well as focal group that allowed the exchange and debate among journalists.

## 5. Results

In the present context hypermedia journalism demands from professionals a constant education that allows them to exploit all the potential that the digital world offers. Changes are generated in methods to tell and also in journalistic practice during news production processes in digital Medias. For the web sites in the province of Matanzas, Cuba, productive routines play a main role in the construction of communicative materials. These routines become essential especially considering the lack of resources and personnel to carry out some tasks.

Usually the Medias of the province of Matanzas, analyze the informative priorities for the website daily in their editorial boards. They also look through the most relevant contents of national and international Medias and press agencies to select those themes that will be raised and make an approach to the main information that appears in their digital editions. In that space are also analyzed the themes that will appear on the social network profiles or pages of each media, the objective of which is mainly to socialize products that show the territorial reality. In this case they all work with Facebook and Twitter, and TV Yumurí has a channel on Youtube. It is necessary to clarify that, for work on institutional profiles on social networks, only Editorial Girón has a web manager for that task; in Radio 26 and TV Yumurí this task is done by web editors or webmasters. Journalistic praxis for the website is still discussed in the editorial departments of these medias. In the process of giving value to certain facts, it is imposed the need to take advantage of the potential of the web and collect under coverage first hand multimedia materials, such as information in audio, photo and video formats to give bigger credibility to the story; it allows the user be closer to the event and receive all angles of the phenomenon from the voice and image of the major figures of the story. Through observation it could be proved that informative material collection is carried out in different ways: in direct coverage of the events and inside the editorial office, where the process acquires a marked digital nature.

## 5.1 Some logics of hypermedia production

Hypermedia production logic demands that all its members become information selectors. Journalists and editors process huge amounts of content, and only a part of it is published in the sites. Practice reveals that after the collection of informative material journalists select the data that will be part of the communicative product, in a way that responds to the news values considered the most important. For instance, stand out immediacy, geographic proximity and informative prominence.

During the second moment they select the images, videos or audios that will be added to the work and edit them through different programs. Most of them have learned this empirically and could exploit more tools; they still need to familiarize themselves with all techniques and options that can be used while they acquire experience. In interviews journalists said that after that they mount their works in the CMS, where they select the related news, hyperlinks and key words, always trying that the work be the most integral as possible, when they finish this process they say that what comes next goes beyond their responsibility and falls in the editor's hands.

The chiefs of the digital editorial teams along with the web editors daily play the main role in the selection, exclusion and the hierarchical organization of digital edition information. In the case of Girón newspaper, the editor says that to select the information of the journalists „they base on the stipulated in the editorial profile. It is about to reach a consensus among relevance, attractiveness and topicality, always considering the use of the web resources and the quality and extension of the works.“<sup>6</sup>

According to the head of the Digital Editorial Department of Girón, who assumes also the task of editing the journalistic works because of a lack of personnel, „if the news or the communicative product has the features that work for cyberspace, then that's the one, sometimes we've had a work for the cover that doesn't have the features, so we don't take that work for the cover.“<sup>7</sup>

For editors, a product „doesn't have the features when there is not an adequate use of hypermedia resources, this is one of the most important elements, when the text doesn't touch an interesting theme, curious and informative, and that can really call the interest of the Internet user...“<sup>8</sup>

Generally, it can be seen that in the Medias of Matanzas there is a lack of informative richness, that's why on occasions they publish many works reproduced from other Medias or works that lack informative quality and language adequate to the media.

## 5.2 Do we need a new narrative?

In the stage of collection and selection of information the reality construction process that the media executes to present the event to the Internet user takes shape and is turned into an informative product, independent of the organizational establishments and routines.

Web site editors consider multimedia resources as very important. They always try so that text comes accompanied with images, for instance, through images galleries, so the journalistic product could be more attractive and make easier the understanding of the theme, even to the most distant user.

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<sup>6</sup> MARTINEZ, A.: *Acercamiento a la cultura profesional de periodistas en las lógicas de producción hipermedia del sitio web de la Editora Girón*. [Dissertation Thesis]. Matanzas : Humanistic and Social Sciences Faculty, University of Matanzas, 2016, p. 45.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

In the medias of Matanzas, audio and video are less used, for several reasons; one of them is the difficulties that journalists have to upload those materials, another is the extra work that implies assuming a different narrative than the one they used for the traditional medias. In spite of that, in the applied questionnaire, most of them refer to knowing the resources of hypermedia language.

These authors consider that difficulties to download audiovisual contents and the low quality of the same, due to the frequent problems of connection to the Internet, restrict full development of the works. This reality is going to change through the XXI century while internet access connections are improved and also while are the video compression formats are improved.

The most used multimedia resources in Editorial Girón, Radio 26 and TV Yumurí, were the static images, most of the journalistic contents presented at least one. Even though, there was a high presence of images, the explicative texts of these must be better conceived. This way they also turn into bridges that link to the work through its descriptions, ALT features and metadata.

To a lesser degree appeared the use of graphics, this resource appears mainly as a complement to the informative content in communicative products about sports. Animations, computer graphics and multimedia files were not frequently used.

Generally, the most frequent multimediality type was juxtaposition, since it gave users the possibility of consuming multimedia contents independently. Through content analysis it was proved that the information in web updates dominates, because besides the own information those from other press media are also taken. Other journalistic genres are used, such as: article, commentary, report, and in some cases photo report, but the sites lack of cyber-genres, of works with a higher level of hypermedia narrative such as: hypermedia reports, multimedia dossier or online interviews. The last ones have been used sporadically.

### **Text depth: hypertextuality**

About hypertextuality, content analysis yielded that according to documentary and narrative functions there is a predominance of hypertexts of informative widening, particularly in matters like sports.

To a lesser degree appeared definition links, these are characterized by referring to web sites of Cuban institutions, and especially to the collaborative encyclopaedia EcuRed ([www.ecured.cu](http://www.ecured.cu)).

Documentary or update hyperlinks have lesser use; this last type of links allow that media inform about the details of ongoing news, that's why they have been used only in particular national or international events. For the researcher Ramón Salaverría these „*connect with nodes where the last known details about the event are published. It is a widely used technique, for instance in the weblogs.*“<sup>9</sup>

According to the morphology of the linked content, the used hyperlinks tended to go to journalistic texts. The lack of links to other formats (graphic, image, audio, animation and multimedia) proved the poor exploitation of multiple interaction possibilities with online resources.

Roberto Pérez-Betancourt, journalist winner of the Bonifacio Byrne's Award for the lifetime work, says that: „*Editor must use the hyperlinks... especially when there are complex materials that require a context widening.*“<sup>10</sup>

Anyway, the journalist is the one that should be more concerned by adding hypertext value to the works. The poor use of hyperlinks in the analyzed media contents limited the possibilities to refer primary sources. This practice, in a coherent and united way, would consolidate the sites credibility in a digital universe where the superabundance of information prevails.

<sup>9</sup> SALAVERRÍA, R.: *Redacción Periodística en Internet*. La Habana, Cuba : Pablo de la Torriente Brau, 2005, p. 137.

<sup>10</sup> PÉREZ, R.: *Una mirada al Periodismo Hipermedia*. [Dissertation Thesis]. Matanzas : Faculty of Social Science, University of Matanzas, 2017, p. 38.

### Interactivity's lost roads

Despite journalists knowing that with the web's arrival, their communicative products acquire a dimension beyond the local, many of them still feel that their work is very little known. For them, comments in the web are still unsatisfactory; journalists need to find the way to foment these comments, and that these help them to know the users interests and motivations.

Sometimes restrictions in the technological infrastructure or difficulties on websites, have limited the interactive process between the media and the cybernauts. For example, debate forums or real time chats, are not regular practices, and collaborative forms of work are not promoted either; the last ones could add new values to information, even when some medias look at them with certain reservations.

Space with greater interactivity is seen on social networks, where they feel they can exchange in a more direct way. There is still missing monitoring of exchanges with users on the themes they are interested in, and turn those social networks born interests into interesting communicative materials. The social network pages of the territory medias still need to take more advantage of their potential, and share the media productive process since their birth by announcing, promoting, exchange, offering information, sharing with users, give real time monitoring, talking and many other skills.

There is also to be considered the fact that in the territory there is still a strong attachment to traditional medias, so taking that space requires intelligence. Between the medias profiles and those of their journalists on social networks, there shouldn't exist a divorce either.

### Looking inside ourselves

Every journalism student, approach to the subjects related with the Hypermedia Journalism in the academia, and later, during the exercise of the profession goes gradually building ways to understand it. In every mass media, depending of its characteristics, journalists share opinions, feelings and beliefs about their profession in the digital scenario. In the debate among journalists of Editorial Girón about what it means to be a digital journalist, the idea stands out of considering a challenge, for them the profession essences are kept in cyberspace but the need of skillful handling of different supports and tools of new media emerges.

According to Gabriela González, journalist in training *„the journalist that works in the digital scenario must be an expert in hypermedia communication, articulate the traditional journalism resources along with those new ones like hypertextuality, multimodality and interactivity; I think he/she must be a journalist be aware of the new technologies and in tune with them, must be in constant training, because the digital journalism dynamics is very fast and changeable.“*<sup>11</sup>

They think their main function as journalists is still to inform the cybernaut about reality in Matanzas and Cuba. However, through focal group application it is proved that most of them are not pleased with the role they play on the website, among other reasons, because they inform but still don't show Matanzas everyday events with all their nuances or with all the quality that hypermedia journalism demands.

Despite all the dissatisfactions regarding their social function performance, half of them consider that their professional performance in the digital scenario is good because they carry out *„the work on time with the use of digital journalism resources, with contents that may be interesting to the user“* and they *„work with love, interest and sacrifice“*, the other half says their work is average. According to them, this last belief comes from the need of perfecting the selection and deeper treatment of themes, short motivation and work organization, the lack of multimedia resources in the contents even when these are good, the urgency to finally understand that the website is an editorial priority in the present.

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<sup>11</sup> GONZÁLEZ, G.: *Pensar y hacer en hipermedia. Un acercamiento a la cultura profesional de los periodistas en las lógicas de producción hipermedia del sitio web de la editora Girón*. [Dissertation Thesis]. Matanzas: Faculty of Social Science, University of Matanzas, 2016, p. 48.

### To do in hypermedia: a professional challenge

Nowadays we have a great challenge in front of us with technological progress and the immense possibilities that the Internet provides, however today at the medias of Matanzas, along with the experienced professionals young journalists with less than five years of experience in the medias are working, this means that they bring the fresh impetus of so called digital natives.

PhD Miguel Ernesto Gómez Masjuán, professor of Hypermedia Journalism at the University of Havana, expressed that *„our graduates have this great challenge to bring to the medias the young blood and indeed, that our medias make that necessary leap, that won't be made just for the presence of the graduates, it's a much more complex process, but I think it's important that our students have everyday new doubts and worries, that they wish to do hypermedia journalism and hen all this be reflected in the journalistic product they socialize.“*<sup>12</sup> From the established link between academic formation and practice emerges a particular way to internalize their roles, in this way journalists' professional culture in the media institution taking shape. In this case new professionals admit they arrive from the academy with little training due to the lack of space with the necessary conditions to apply what they learned in classes. This makes their later work difficult. When they face media dynamics they start adapting to productive routines, in this case most of the surveyed journalists express that they put higher care and effort in journalistic production for traditional media because the structure demands it like that.

On the Girón website, for example, it was proved that the editor's work, a journalism graduate with less than three years of experience, goes beyond simply adding news from other medias, they act also as content generator about attractive and controversial themes, directed specifically to this media, with a high impact on Internet users. This is a significant element of the process.

For Gómez Masjuán *„in a scenario in which Cuba moves towards a higher penetration of new technologies for a new government will and for a new scenario in which the country is inserted, to the Cuban medias it will be a huge challenge, because people is going to gain access, actually the already gained it and accesses to more information sources and this gives them a wider look of the world and specially the immediacy, it means people knows things that take place not only in Syria or Washington, but also in Matanzas, people in a higher connection scenario accesses to alternative news sources and it may lead to the media to ask to itself about the work they've, the work they do, and the one they will do. If you have competitors, you might lose what you've always had, you have been the information source but, in a scenario where her is more interconnected persons, fear needs to be transformed or what was gained with time and effort, will be lost.“*<sup>13</sup>

They still see immediacy and informative monitoring as a challenge for the digital edition, in the interviews they recognize that in some moments they've lived through that experience and couldn't systematize it. During big events, work teams should be formed that constantly contribute to the web site in a way that exercises those skills they demand and turn them into habits. Most of the surveyed journalists think that to improve work for the website, among other aspects, should be increased improvements in the sites. Create work teams that attend exclusively the web, change work organization, direct it with higher intent and following the daily tendencies that move the web. Update it every time that comes to the editorial department a newsworthy journalistic work and not when journalists decide to publish it. However, beyond improvement wishes that the media journalists share and recognition around the performance of their function in cyberspace, weighs heavily the attachment to traditional models in the logic of website production in a group that is not still consolidated because they are mostly young graduates with little experience, these factors promote a still incipient professional culture of hypermedia journalism.

<sup>12</sup> MARTINEZ, A.: *Acercamiento a la cultura profesional de periodistas en las lógicas de producción hipermedia del sitio web de la Editora Girón*. [Dissertation Thesis]. Matanzas : Humanistic and Social Sciences Faculty, University of Matanzas, 2016, p. 53.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 57



## 6. Conclusion

During this research it could be proved that; at the present times in the journalist's professional culture of the websites in Matanzas, Cuba, traditional elements prevail as dominant and emergent elements of hypermedia journalism are beginning, providing guidelines to a still incipient practice.

A consolidated professional culture that identifies that a team of journalists of little professional experience that produce the website, is not evidenced yet, because when they graduate they have little theoretical knowledge about cyberjournalism, but when they move into work life they have to face up to a scenario with technological and structural difficulties that doesn't make it easier for them to more dynamically integrate work, as cyberspace demands.

Despite being a young team they've assumed practices attached to the traditional model and reproduced them instead of implement new ways to do, wearing down like this the younger professional's initiative that arrives wishing to change old habits. Productive routines are formed by information collection, selection, processing and presentation of news. They are characterized by not consolidated organizations that prioritize traditional media, it causes most journalists to produce for websites only with the purpose of achieving a goal.

The journalists of the websites share professional ideologies that are reproduced by socialization. Among the elements that form them are: dissatisfaction with their social function performance in cyberspace, demotivation about their social recognition as digital journalists due to little feedback from users.

In the production logic editors have turned into kind of leaders, identified in their teams for their work on the websites, which are not limited to selection, checking and hierarchic organization of contents, they also reproduce them; they are the persons which almost everyone goes to clarify doubts about the use of hypermedia resources in their communicative products, among other themes.

They still have to make good use of the potential of hypermedia language, the essential features of multimediality, hypertextuality and interactivity must become everyday practice and be used in a coherent way, to achieve what is necessary – to realize the web requires a different narrative.

Another element, is that most of the journalistic personnel that work today in the analyzed websites, have the basic and fundamental knowledge to exercise hypermedia journalism, improve themselves with better performance and the higher quality of the materials should now become their goal.

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## Digitalization Of Memories – An analysis Relationship Between Autobiographical Memory And Digital Photography

### ABSTRACT

Photography has been used as a mnemonic since its early years. It has the power to move the past to the present by breaking down the structure of time. Presenting a static image, it records an image of a past time. Looking through family and childhood photo albums, the person embarks on a journey through the past in his/her memory. Following digitalization, the function of photography has been changed in accordance with the transformation of it from analogue to digital. Photography is not only a mnemonic but also contains the function of the enjoyment of individuals, creating self, self-presenting to others. In terms of storage, screening and sharing, digital photography is more convenient and accessible than analogue photography. For these reasons, people's interest in digital photography has been rising and it encourages taking/recording images at the moments that will create their memories in the years ahead. The aim of this paper is to examine the relationship between autobiographical memory (contains information about individual experiences, memories) and forgetting/remembering between digital photography. The nature of the subject required the use of both qualitative and theoretical analysis of the participants' social media usage. The research data was collected conducting semi-structured interviews with participants who shared their images about individual lives and memories on social media. In addition, benefiting from the observation technique, the participants were requested to look at both printed and digital photo albums and asked if they remember the corresponding memories. The theoretical insights are based on critical theory. The studies reveal that memories become digital and affect memory due to rising motivation to take and share pictures on the social media.

### KEY WORDS

Autobiographical memory. Digital amnesia. Digitalization of memories. Memories. Screen memory.

# 1. Introduction

The increase in the product range of digital technologies and expanded usage areas has enabled people to satisfy their needs via digital devices. The dynamics that a society needs most are news, entertainment, and information. It is at one's fingertips to learn about any event anywhere in the world by pressing the TV button, to communicate with people who are far away with the touch of a phone, to reach all kinds of information and people who seem to be inaccessible as you enter the internet.

With the widespread use of the internet and mobile technologies since the 2000s, digital platforms such as social media, social forums, and e-mail connect people together interactively and help bring people into each another's awareness and allow them to discover commonalities and contact one another.<sup>1</sup> In this new form of communication people have begun to gather around a network, independent of time and space. Jan Van Dijk points out that the new society is an extension of the information society and states that the world has become a global network.<sup>2</sup> In today's digital world where speed and consumption are of great importance, digital technologies that spread to all areas of life have become socially crucial with the development of communication technologies. The internet that surrounds daily life brings people around a network like nerve cells day by day, so our society becomes a digitally dependent one.<sup>3</sup>

According to the digital report of January 2020, 7.75 billion people use the internet all over the world. This number corresponds to 55% of the world's total population of which 5.19 billion are unique mobile phone users, 4.54 billion internet users and 3.80 billion active social media users and the numbers are gradually increasing.<sup>4</sup> Looking at the statistical information, it can be seen that more than half of the world is connected to the Internet. Social media is the most common platform of internet users. From every corporation and organization to mere individuals, from large companies to small companies, to institutions, everyone has a social media account. Photos and videos are prominent on social media so that people record and share their experiences, emotions, memories in their life with technological devices in order to gain the likes of others and increase their number of followers/friends from social media.

Photography is one of the most effective memory tools throughout history. The power of photography lies in recording candid-time and capturing the moment forever. When a person looks through family and childhood photo albums, they embark on a journey through their past and their memories. Digital photography is easier, more accessible to screen, share, print and it costs less compared to analogue photography. The prominence of digital photography on social media has changed the function of photography. Photography is not just a mnemonic but also serves as a function of the enjoyment of individuals, socialising, creating the self and presenting the self to others.

Instead of seizing the moment and focusing on the present, people take photographs and record images of moments such as eating or going on a trip with family or friends etc., which will create their memories. This is both a result of rising interest in digital photography and increased motivation to share these images on social media. Each day, approximately 500 million people share Instagram<sup>5</sup> stories, 300 million people share Facebook<sup>6</sup> stories and 500

<sup>1</sup> CHAYKO, M.: *Superconnected – The Internet, Digital media & Techno-Social Life*. California : Sage Pub., 2017, p. 6.

<sup>2</sup> DIJK, V. J.: *The Network Society*. London : Sage Pub., 2012, p. 19.

<sup>3</sup> EYREK, A.: *Screen memory - amnesia in the cultural industry*. Istanbul : Doruk Pub., 2020, p.170.

<sup>4</sup> KEMP, S.: *Digital 2020: 3.8 Billion People Use Social Media*. [online]. [2020-03-09]. Available at: <<https://wearesocial.com/blog/2020/01/digital-2020-3-8-billion-people-use-social-media/>>.

<sup>5</sup> NEWBERRY, C.: *37 Instagram Stats That Matter to Marketers in 2020*. [online]. [2020-01-09]. Available at: <<https://blog.hootsuite.com/instagram-statistics/>>.

<sup>6</sup> NEWBERRY, C.: *33 Facebook Stats That Matter to Marketers in 2020*. [online]. [2020-01-09]. Available at: <<https://blog.hootsuite.com/facebook-statistics/>>.

million tweets<sup>7</sup> are sent. Generally, the contents of these stories are about the private lives of the respective people, captures of their daily life and their individual emotion and experiences. It is interesting to see the statistics of the amount of time people spend on social media daily. The world's internet users are spending an average of 6 hours and 43 minutes online each day of which 2 hours and 24 minutes are spent on social media on all devices.<sup>8</sup>

The aim of this paper is to examine the relationship between autobiographical memory and the effect of forgetting/remembering related to digital photography. To this end, firstly, the concepts of „photography“, „digitalization of memories“ and „amnesia“ will be opened to discussion and the theoretical background of the study will be drawn. Semi-structured interviews of qualitative methods were used in the study and the argument of this study was supported by data collected conducting semi-structured interviews with 20 participants, aged 15-60, who have shared images about their individual lives and memories on social media. In addition, the participants were requested to look at both digital and printed photo albums and to tell the stories of the photo. This study reveals that, memories that become digital affect the autobiographic memory due to the rising motivation to take/share pictures on social media.

## 2. Social Media and Digital Photography

Challenging the irreversibility and permanence of time, the photograph captures the moment and records it forever. The power of photography is that it produces a copy of the reality of events and experience. The subject of photography is the past and it presents us with a moment's image, of events that have already happened and usually ended.<sup>9</sup> Walter Benjamin explains the function of the photography to save the images of a moment forever: „*The true image of the past flits by. The past can be seized only as an image that flashes up at the moment of its recognizability, and is never seen again.*“<sup>10</sup> According to Benjamin the saving of the captured image with the help of camera lights is linked to the relationship between past and present. John Berger also expressed: „*The photograph is an automatic record through the mediation of light of a given event: yet it uses the given event to explain its recording.*“<sup>11</sup> As Benjamin claims the objects or people seen in the photography represent culture and society within a historic moment. The photography breaks lose of its chains as a part of the past within time's flow and it turns the past into an object of tender regard.<sup>12</sup>

Douwe Draaisma underlines the function of photography not losing anything as photography is described as having a „moment of immortality“ and as being capable of „freezing the moment“. He also expresses the relationship between memory and photography.

„*The fact that the photography 'had forgotten nothing' is typical of the gist of many photographic metaphors. As analogies for visual representations photographs particularly stress the immutability of what is stored as a memory: they suggest a memory that forgets nothing, that contains a perfect, permanent record of visual experience.*“<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> SMITH, K.: *60 Incredible and Interesting Twitter Stats and Statistics*. [online]. [2020-01-09]. Available at: <<https://www.brandwatch.com/blog/twitter-stats-and-statistics/>>.

<sup>8</sup> KEMP, S.: *Digital 2020: 3.8 Billion People Use Social Media*. [online]. [2020-03-09]. Available at: <<https://wearesocial.com/blog/2020/01/digital-2020-3-8-billion-people-use-social-media/>>.

<sup>9</sup> SAGLAMTIMUR, Z.: Relationship Between History and Photography from Walter Benjamin's Point of View. In *Journal of Communication Theory and Research*, 2013, Vol. 37, No. 37, p. 237.

<sup>10</sup> BENJAMIN, W.: Selected Writings: 4 (1938–1940). In EILAND, H., JENNINGS M. W. (eds.): *On the Concept of History*. London : The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003, p. 390.

<sup>11</sup> BERGER, J.: *Understanding a Photograph*. England : Pelican Book, 1972, p. 292.

<sup>12</sup> SONTAG, S.: *On Photography*. New York : Rosetta Books LLC., 1989, p. 8.

<sup>13</sup> DRAAISMA, D.: *Metaphors of Memory: A History of Ideas about the Mind*. England : Cambridge University Press, 2000, p. 121.



The fact that photography is easily moved from one place to another and its archiving ability of it provides the most effective memory tool, quite unlike other memory tools. Another reason is the function of photography to remind people and society about their past and to keep their memory alive. It is also possible to see this in family albums which present images of the past to family members or relatives and keeps family togetherness and their memory alive. Looking at the photos of family dinners, religious celebrations or weddings of family members, each of the family members returns to the family's memories and those moments. Like the emphasis of family photos on memory and togetherness, the person's own photographs include the history of a person, the representation of the characteristics that make the person an individual. „*The photography is privileged to help man view himself, expand and preserve his experiences, and exchange vital communications—a faithful instrument whose reach need not extend farther than that of the way of life it reflects*“.<sup>14</sup> According to Andre Bazin, the photographic image is the object itself, the object freed from the conditions of time and space that govern it.<sup>15</sup>

In modern life, photography has become a consolation to the situation caused by the fear of being transient, lost or knowing his past, not having roots, based on the need of people to feel valuable.<sup>16</sup> Social media appears as the area where this consolation is realized. Through social media, a person has found the chance to present the image of self which is the person he/she wants to present to the others. A person who presents his own image by sharing a selfie on social media as in the Mirror Stage Theory, gives a message saying „*I'm also here and I exist*“.<sup>17</sup> According to Jean Baudrillard, these phenomena contains a message beyond „*I'm also here*“ it also says „*I'm an image, Look!-Look!*“<sup>17</sup>

The moment of encountering with another on the social media is hidden in the new definition of the public sphere. In this regard, the home page of social media platforms is a sphere which is described by Hannah Arendt as a public sphere where people see each other and are seen by each other. On the other hand, a personal page is a sphere in which people scrolling on social media are walking on the streets of the digital city, they discover the external world, present their lives and their phenomena to others and also they discover the similarities or differences of each other. The people who create and present their own image to others on social media, within the feeling of acceptance and appreciation, open the doors of their lives to one another. The more they include others in their networks (if they increase their followers and friends), the more they become visible and famous. The most efficient way of being visible is to bring the visual to the fore.

The photography shared on social media about their daily lives creates autobiographical memories of people. Even if still a memory tool, the digital camera is now pushed as an instrument for identity construction, allowing more shaping power over autobiographical memories.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, the inevitable effort of memory to recover the past in autobiography is frequently structured according to flashes, incidents, spots of time, fragments that bear resemblance to the photographic freezing of the current of life.<sup>19</sup>

How will the motivation of presenting autobiographical memories to others and at the same time recording moments through photography and video affect memory? The functioning of memory can give us clues about the answer to this question.

<sup>14</sup> ARNHEIM, R.: On the Nature of Photography. In *Critical Inquiry*, 1974, Vol. 1, No. 1, p.160.

<sup>15</sup> BAZIN, A.: The Ontology of the Photographic Image. In *Film Quarterly*, 1960, Vol. 13, No. 4, p. 8.

<sup>16</sup> ERKONAN, Ş.: Family Photographs: Exploring The Role Of Photography In The Construction Of Family Memory With The Ethnographic Method. In *Journal of Cultural Studies, Moment*, 2014, Vol. 1, No. 2, p. 127.

<sup>17</sup> BAUDRILLARD, J.: *The Transparency of Evil- Essays on Extreme Phenomena*. England : Verso, 1993, p. 23.

<sup>18</sup> VAN DIJCK, J.: Digital photography: communication, identity, memory. In *Visual Communication*, 2008, Vol. 7, No. 1, p. 71.

<sup>19</sup> ORVELL, M.: Picturing Ourselves: Photography and Autobiography (review). In *Biography*, 1998, Vol. 21, No. 3, p. 352.

### 3. Amnesia and Autobiographical Memory

When we talk of memory the first thing that comes to mind is the physiology of the brain. However, memory is quite dynamic so as not to fit into only one explanation and definition. Societies need memory to conserve their identity and cultural heritage just as people need memory to make life meaningful and to exist. Memory is one of the most discussed concepts under different disciplines after the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Pierre Nora attributes this to eradication of memory. The memory according to Nora, is like shells on the shore when the sea of living memory has receded.<sup>20</sup> If there are no seashells anymore, amnesia occurs. The basic meaning of amnesia is described as not remembering past experiences and losing the ability to recall.

The memory process involves three main memory stages: encoding, storage and retrieval. The three forms of memory storage, which has been used in memory studies since 1960, states that memory is structured in three stages: sensory, short and long-term. According to the studies, the information is first encoded in the sensory memory. The information remains here for a time and it will be erased forever if not perceived within 3-4 seconds. The perceived information is transferred to short-term memory which will be stored in memory for 15-25 seconds. If the information is not coded and rehearsed, it will be rapidly lost from this store. The information which is recoded and rehearsed, is transferred from short-term memory to long-term memory where it is permanent and can be stored for a long time. Recollection occurs by recalling information from the stored area.

There is a constant flow of information and images on social media. At this speed and fluidity, every piece of information that is not transferred to short term memory faces loss. Erik Fransén, from KTH - the Royal Institute of Technology, in 2013 researched short term memory and how the brain uses the knowledge that enters through neuron cells. As a result of this research, he found that since the capacity of short-term memory is limited, when a person is browsing online, she/he could be losing important/needed stored information and can easily become hobbled by information overload. Fransén especially said that short-term memory cannot respond to this information bombardment. Fransén says: „*When you are on Facebook, you are making it harder to keep the things that are 'online' in your brain that you need. In fact, when you try to process sensory information like speech or video, you are going to need partly the same system of working memory, so you are reducing your own working memory capacity*“.<sup>21</sup>

As stated by Fransén, the capacity of short-term memory is limited against the information and images flow on social media. Any information and images that are not transferred to short-term memory will not be remembered after a while. If the information is not coded and rehearsed, it will not be stored in the long-term memory and amnesia will occur.

Another important research about digital technologies and memory was conducted by the Kaspersky Laboratory in 2015 on how digital devices and internet affect memory. The research shows that people trust the memory of digital devices instead of their own memory and entrust their memory to the devices. The result of this research in which the laboratory surveyed 1 000 people in the United States aged between 16 and 55+ shows that almost all (91%) of those surveyed agreed that they use the internet as an online extension of their brain and admitted that their digital devices serve as their memory tool. Kaspersky Lab. has termed this phenomenon „*Digital Amnesia*“: the experience of forgetting information that you trust in a digital device to store and remember for you. The regulation of this high-tech world threatens to outdate categories such as past and future, reality and expectation, and memory and future design.<sup>22</sup> As can be seen from the research, as the technology advances, human memory becomes weaker.

<sup>20</sup> NORA, P.: *Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire*. In *Representations - Special Issue: Memory and Counter-Memory*, 1989, No. 26, p. 12.

<sup>21</sup> *Online Time Can Hobble Brain's Important Work*. [online]. [2020-01-09]. Available at: <<https://www.kth.se/en/aktuell/nyheter/online-time-can-hobble-brain-s-important-work-1.415391>>.

<sup>22</sup> RIGEL, N.: *Dream Blindness*. Istanbul : Der Pub., 2000, p. 47.

Autobiographical memory is the type of memory in which one refers to personal experiences and personal events of said individual's life. This memory is divided into episodic and semantic. Semantic memory stores common knowledge such as names and colour and episodic memory receives and stores information about temporal dates, episodes or events, and temporal-spatial relations among these events. Episodic memory stores personal experiences and events.<sup>23</sup>

Social media and autobiographical memory research is also of interest for academic studies, as are social media and people sharing moments from their daily lives. It is necessary to separate the research positively<sup>24</sup> and negatively<sup>25 26</sup> in terms of its effect on the memory. On the one hand studies show that social media helps people with their memory, but also sharing the memories on social media has proven to have a negative effect.

## 4. Methods

In order to understand the role of photography in the construction of an individual's autobiographical memory, semi-structured interview methods were used as one of the qualitative methods. Semi-structured interviews consist of open-ended questions and enable the diversification of questions depending on the interview flow.<sup>27</sup> Within the scope of this research the interviews were conducted with participants aged between 15-60. Open-ended questions were used but depending on the nature of the interview the use of other questions spontaneously were employed. The interview questions are shown in Scheme 1. In addition, following the observation technique, the participants were requested to look at both printed and digital photo albums and asked if they remember the corresponding memories.

Theme	Key Point/Questions	Objective
Social Media Usage	How much time do we spend on social media per day? Which social media do they have? How often they post on social media? What are the types of content post on social media?	To ask users of each social media platform how often they engage To learn from users the types of content posts
Sharing Individual Memories on Social Media Digitalization of Memories	What is the meaning of individual memories for you? Do you share about your personal life on social media? And Why?	To learn their motivation for taking photos and sharing on social media.
Remember Printed/ Digital Album and Photography	Do you have a printed photo album? Do you print digital photos? What is the difference between digital or printed photography to remember? Do you remember your all digital photos in your social media accounts?	To find out the relationship between sharing memories on social media and autobiographical memory.

SCHEME 1: Interview questions

Source: own processing, 2020

<sup>23</sup> TULVING, E.: *Episodic and Semantic Memory*. London : Academic Press Inv., 1972, p. 386.

<sup>24</sup> WANG, O., LEE, D., HOU, Y.: Externalising the autobiographical self: sharing personal memories online facilitated memory retention. In *Memory*, 2017, Vol. 25, No. 6, p. 772–776.

<sup>25</sup> TAMIR, D., TEMPLETON, E. M., WARD, A. F., ZAKI, J.: Media usage diminishes memory for experiences. In *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 2018, Vol. 76, No. 1, p. 161–168.

<sup>26</sup> HENKEL, L. A.: Point-and-shoot memories: The influence of taking photos on memory for a museum tour. In *Psychological Science*, 2014, Vol. 25, No. 2, p. 396–402.

<sup>27</sup> ADAMS, C. W.: Handbook of Practical Program Evaluation. In NEWCOMER, E. K., HATRY, H. P., WHOLEY, J. S. (eds.): *Conducting Semi-Structured Interviews*. California : Jossey-Bass Co., 2015, p. 493.

Every interview theme has been chosen in order to provide a basis for determining the relationship between digital photography and the autobiographical memories of people sharing on social media. Before their interview, participants were informed about the scope and aim of the research. The interviews were recorded with the permission of the participant considering data loss. I transcribed the voice record and sent back the transcription back if the participant requested. The participants were informed that the data would not be used outside this research and that they could read the transcriptions of the interview if they wished. The semi-structured interviews should be at least half an hour and at most 2 hours.<sup>28</sup> For this reason interviews were designed to last not more than 45 minutes to 1 hour. Interviews were held where people wanted them to be and where they felt comfortable which was mostly in their homes. One of the advantages of being in their home for the research was to look at photos which were framed and put on the wall or on the table. Anonymized codes were used to protect participant privacy and names in the research (I1, I2, I3..).

Sample size in the qualitative researches can be determined by content, scope and data saturation of the study by looking at similar studies. If the sample size allows the researcher to achieve similar results that repeat, in the preliminary analysis part of the data and the interview results, data saturation is assumed to be achieved. In this study, it was ascertained that 20 people were sufficient in terms of data saturation of the research.<sup>29</sup>

## 5. Results and Discussion

The results of the research were divided into three sections as to the interview questions. The first section will inform us about participants' social media usage, the second part about their postings on social media and the last part on the effect of printed and digital albums on their memory.

### 5.1 Social Media Usage

In this study, it is seen that participants spend an average of 2 hours 10 minute daily on social media which is similar to the average social media use of people around the world per day. It is observed that the participants' access social media from their smartphones, computers, tablets and laptops, each of them has a smartphone and all of them have at least two digital devices at their houses.

They use social media to communicate with others, to follow the news, to share photography and videos, to get information about people they have not seen for a long time and to stalk their exes (?!?!). All of them have accounts on at least two different social media platforms and have WhatsApp. They prefer this application to send messages, images, audio and video and to communicate with groups of which they are members.

<sup>28</sup> WILSON, C.: *Interview Techniques for UX Practitioners*. Boston : Elsevier, 2014, p. 25.

<sup>29</sup> LOFLAND, J., LOFLAND, L. H.: *Analyzing Social Settings – A Guide to Qualitative Observation and Analysis*. California : Wadsworth Publishing Co., 1984, p. 62.

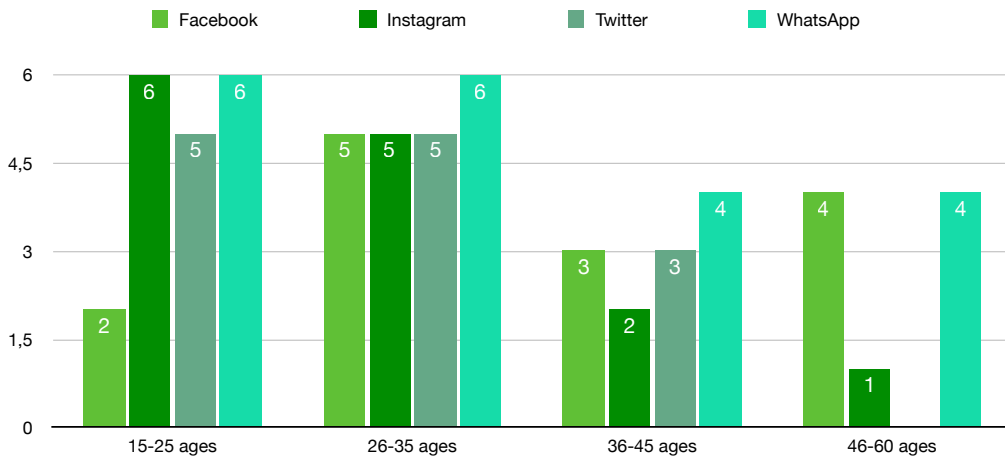


CHART 1: Distribution of participants using social media platforms

Source: own processing, 2020

As can be seen in Chart 1, 14 out of 20 participants have Facebook and Instagram accounts and 13 out of 20 have Twitter accounts.<sup>30</sup> The result has shown that people aged between 15–45 mostly used Instagram and people aged between 36–60 mostly used Facebook and WhatsApp.

17 years old participant said that: „I don't use Facebook because older people use it more“.

26 years old participant said: „Facebook is outdated and old-fashioned“.

53 years old participant said: „There is a lot of social media platforms. I cannot follow all of them. I use Facebook because I have more friends there. Most of my friends prefer this platform“.

In this research, people aged 15–45 define themselves as more active and accessible on social media compared to people aged 45 and over. Social media is also a place to spend time especially for those aged 55 and over. For this reason, they prefer to follow and read the posts rather than sharing. Participants' posting frequency for social media appears to be 4–5 posts each day.

It was observed that the content changed depending on the social media platforms that are being used. Generally, Facebook users share informative posts, funny videos, news, their own images and videos, their emotions and opinions. Twitter users share their insights on news and daily politics whereas Instagram users share their own images and stories taken throughout the day.

## 5.2 About Sharing on Social Media

„What is the meaning of individual memories for you?“ was asked to participants. They describe their memories as „being with family“, „being with a close friend or relative“, „going on a trip“, „celebrating birthday parties“, „attending wedding parties“, „eating dinner with friends or family“.

Another question asked to the participants was „Do you share your personal life on social media?“ All of them answered that they share bits about their personal lives. It was observed that young people aged between 15–35 post more frequently about their private lives compared to people aged between 36–60. The older generation seems to limit sharing their personal life publicly and they don't share it with everyone.

<sup>30</sup> In this research, social media platforms were limited to Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter and Instagram according to the social platforms mostly used by them.



To learn their motivation for sharing personal life on social media we asked: „when you go on a trip or when you meet family/friends do you take photographs and share them on social media?“ 16 out of 20 stated that they record and share photography of those occasions and 4 out of 20 stated that they take and record of their memories but don't share on social media because they don't want to inform people about their personal lives. Also they were asked:

„Why do you share?“ It's been stated that they value people's admiration and that they want to share happy memories with others.

The participant aged 19 said: „I use social media for sharing. It does not mean anything to be there if you don't share“.

The participant aged 33 said: „I don't often share about my private life. I share photography but only of my travels“.

The participant aged 59 said: „I take pictures with my family and share it. I share the videos of having fun with my grandchildren. My friends post comments under my post. It makes me happy“.

It appears that sharing and posting on social media makes it possible for a person to stay in contact with others and as the 19 year old claims social media's purpose is to share memories.

### 5.3 Remember Printed/Digital Album and Photography

14 out of 20 participants have printed photo albums, and all of them have digital albums. The printed photo albums of people aged 15–25 belong to their childhood years, which were collected for them by their family. They haven't got printed photographs of the recent years.

23 years old participant said: „Almost everything has become digital. It seems unnecessary to me to have a printed photo album“.

60 years old participant said: „We grew up with family photo albums. It is a tradition for us. I have photography all over my house. When I see them, I remember good old days and it makes me happy“.

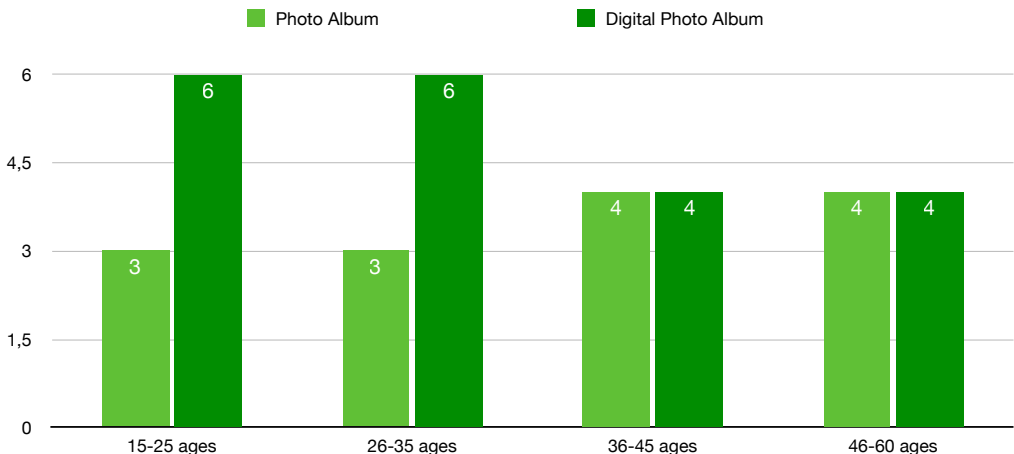


CHART 2: Participants having a printed or digital album by age

Source: own processing, 2020

The printed photo albums of the participants were looked at with the participants themselves. Even though photography presents a static image, it consists of the present time and it is a memory tool. That is why participants remembered their past and stories of photography and they returned to their memories as they looked at the static images of photo albums. As they looked at the photos they remembered respective stories and memories of the photos.

One 53 year old female participant looked at her travel photo album on her Facebook and she stated that she remembered the trip with its broad lines but couldn't remember particular photos of flowers and trees. She felt as if she was looking at them for the first time. A 17 year old freshman had shared photos of his high school time on his Instagram. He looked at the album in which there is a photo of boats and oars but, he couldn't remember this photo. He said: „I think I may have liked it but, I can't remember putting this photo on my album exactly“.

A 20 year old participant underlined the difference between printed and digital photos. „It is very clear in my mind when and where my printed photos were taken. I also remember the moment of caption. For example I have a photo that was taken in the funfair and I clearly remember the exact moment. If you ask me about a photo took 15 days ago I couldn't remember where it was taken“.

A 39 year old participant said: „The printed photography is easier to remember because there aren't many of them. You print it and put it on the wall or put it on the table. These are in front of your eyes. The digital photography is easier to forget because you take it and you don't look at it afterwards“.

11 out of 20 participants have difficulties remembering the digital photos on their social media. Generally, these photos were about flowers, objects, nature photography and their own selfies. When they looked at their printed photos, they experienced past emotions and memories and told details of the photo's stories. On the other hand, digital photography was observed to be only a tool of enjoyment and sharing on social media for young people. These young participants became happy when they looked at their childhood photos then they took a photo of these photos to share on social media.

Smartphones make photography easier and increase the speed of sharing on social media. Digital devices such as a computers, hard drives, and cloud technologies are being used for the storage of digital photography. Younger people back up their photography and videos using cloud technology and hard drives, while older people only store them in their smartphones.

## 6. Conclusions

Social media platforms put friends and family members in touch or help them establish relationships with new people. Each day, hundreds of millions of people share their experiences on their social media. Social media allows us to get hold of these moments by sharing them with others. People's interest in digital photography has been rising and it encourages them to take/record images at the moments which will create their memories in the years ahead. The study shows how effective dependence on social media has come to affect people's memory and their ability to remember. In this research semi-structured interviews with 20 people have been conducted to discover a direct link between sharing individual photography on social media and its effects on memory. Increased motivation of sharing on social media distracts us from our memories and limits the ability to remember particular moments. More than half (11 out of 20) of the participants have difficulties remembering the digital photos on their social media. These photos were often taken for sharing on social media. It can be concluded that the motivation to share on social media diminishes the recollection of memories and moments.

As the study shows, printed photo albums are still important to older people whereas the young keep their memories on digital platforms. Younger people trust their digital devices instead of their own memory to store and remember. This research highlights how digital technology affects memory and how it may change the perception of memories for people in the future.

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photo: Dominik Mičuda



Patrik Šenkár

## Autobiography As A Genre Of Literary Remembering And Communication (And Its Presence In The Texts Of Albert Martiš)

### ABSTRACT

The paper points out the importance of autobiography as a significant form of literary development. It is characterised by its main and typical features from the point of view of the most influential cultural thinkers. It expresses the general meaning of (chosen) individuality in the background of contemporary context and versatile (determined, diverse) contacts. By such an object, it comes to the axiom that it is a kind of (re) presentation of the world, the period, creative people and their efforts in the cultural, literary, prosaic field. After general observations, the paper deals with the Kulpín native Albert Martiš (1855 - 1918), a prominent figure among the Slovaks in Serbia; then a resident, citizen, teacher, minority author within the Austro-Hungarian monarchy. It mentions the author's work, his memories of childhood and school years, but also his contemporary life. Based on this, it also reflects on unusual themes and portrayals of artistic material from the aspect of Martiš's short story-making. It analyses his versatile cultural-enlightening activity, with emphasis on his autobiographical features and short stories. This type of memoir literature presents Albert Martiš - according to literary criticism - from his best creative side. At the same time, the article interprets, from an objective-subjective point of view, his commemorative prose with autobiographical elements entitled *Memories of the Lower Land Revival*. Based on the documentary character of this work, the text analyses surroundings, social situations and prominent cultural and literary "workers" of the time. With special regard, it emphasizes the life and work of Albert Martiš, his gradual confirmation of education, morality and character, of course, in the background of the examined prototexts. The paper points out the most typical features of this segment of his literary work in the mentioned short stories, in which their specific diversity (even characteristic) is particularly interesting. The interpretation method from the position of perceptive reading presents various (concrete) elements of autobiography, which not only derive the typical features of Albert Martiš's author idiolect, but also the overall social "atmosphere" of the Lowland in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In this way, the individual and collective memory of the past is being concretised at present, thanks to the interpreted prose, which is in fact a kind of media in various contexts of the cultural-literary tradition of all of us (also in the future).

### KEY WORDS

Ethnic minority. Slovaks in Serbia (Vojvodina). Autobiography. Albert Martiš. Interpretation.



## 1. Introduction

The complex cultural development of the nation is closely related to the issues of diachrony and synchrony. It is a sign of continuity, viability, purposefulness. This creates art, which is in its entirety and in parts a part of immaterial culture. The literary-historical aspect also has a peculiar and inevitable bond, a kind of pulsation of an expanding, but sometimes also a narrowing, artistic space. The advance of the culture of mankind (including the arts) is carried out as the progress of different regions that are more or less connected to one another. For this reason, it is extremely important to observe and then interpret artistic - in our case prosaic - texts of a selected (often regional, peripheral, non-dominant) region that is naturally tied to a particular chronotope. For this reason too, the coordinate system of the region is in the broadest sense a problem of space and time: in the literary work of the environment and events, in the literary process of the question of literary situations, life, culture and tradition. In the context of tradition that is related to the region, this is a complementary issue. What characterizes the unity of time and space in the physical sense is in the creation of literary situations a unity of the local or the global and creativity or tradition. In the case of creativity and tradition, there are multiple interrelationships and connections between the present, past and future. For the historical existence of literary works, this means that both present and past works are confirmed in their multidimensionality. Each new link reveals a new meaning and value aspect of a literary work. In this we see the uniqueness and unrepeatability of the analysis of a literary work - especially from the aspect of the past and the present. It combines both individual and collective memory with contemporary access to prototext, and perhaps even literary metatext - in the cultural-literary context of Slovaks living abroad too.

## 2. Literary memory and autobiography as its typical genre concretization as a starting point for research

This memory (from the position of literature) naturally also has its genre concretization. One of the most typical forms that are „objectified“ in the process of literary communication is autobiography. Autobiographism is what „...we can call a stylistically characteristic literary reception of ideas.“<sup>1</sup>

Autobiography is an epic literary genre of narrative character, based on the author's thorough presentation of his own life or some of its sections. It is the preferred type of memoir literature, which has declared its upsurge since the second half of the 18th century. The term „autobiography“ was first used by the English romantic poet Robert Southey (1774 - 1843), who in 1809 called the biography of the Portuguese painter Francis Vieira (1699 - 1783) an autobiography. The definition of this genre was not only a subject matter for the Slovakistic but also the Slavistic literary science<sup>2</sup>, thus pointing out the pitfalls and specifics of the genre boundaries of autobiography itself.

At present, autobiography is often narrowed down to being a biographical work. In a broader sense, however, we understand it as an artistic text in which its author describes the extraordinary events of his/her life. In a narrower sense, we can speak of strict (true) autobiography with special poetological features that separate it from all other types of memoir works. It is therefore retrospective prosaic information created by a real person about his or

<sup>1</sup> MEDARIC, M.: Autobiography and autobiographism. In *Russian Literature*, 1996, Vol. 40, No. 1, p. 31.

<sup>2</sup> See for details: GUSDORF, G.: Conditions and limitations of the genre of autobiography. In *Pamiętnik literacki*, 1979, Vol. 70, No. 1, p. 261-278.

her existence, with the main emphasis being on one's own individual life and its subjective history. American researcher Kathleen Lynch states in her review article of a major publication (A History of English Autobiography, edited by Adam Smyth, 2016, Cambridge University Press) that: „Even as we write about autobiography before ‘autobiography’, we often still read early modern autobiographical narratives through the lens of generic conventions that reified an introspective, retrospective self.“<sup>3</sup> That is why we should approach these texts of older autobiographies in both directions: from the past to the present and vice versa. In this way, the tradition and actual interpretation of given literary texts is contaminated.

An autobiographical text is one whose author is the same as the narrator presenting an actual reality in an unmediated way. The events described by him or her originate in his or her personal life and are actually verifiable. More than the aesthetic qualities, it emphasizes its documentary character, i.e. a significant degree of objectivity or conformity with reality. Autobiographical literature has its origin in the subject and in events that are situated outside the text and precede it. Such a text creates a new textual reality that is a hybrid of fact and fiction, and its form is the result of the possibilities of language and poetics through which the very effect of autobiography ultimately arises. These are texts that speak of the author's life through the deliberate involvement of fictionality in an autobiographical statement. Thus, in fact, fictional and factual narration is linked to the analysis of autofiction and metabiographic works. In this form, there are theorists who explain the method of engaging fiction in an autobiographical text as a means of reflecting on remembrance, as a possibility to depict their own life and create their own self by writing - also by putting their own identity behind the secondary line of the literary text.<sup>4</sup> The stability of the subject is able to achieve such a degree of self-knowledge that he / she presents it as authentic in the text. The author of the text „...is not only the originator of its meaning, but also unifies the narrated events of individual life anchored in historical time. The constitutive principle that allows all of this is the individual memory, acting as a guarantor of its individuality and hence the uniqueness of its experience (behind the coherent and complex identity - note P. Š).“<sup>5</sup> The identity of this subject is this memory, which is created during the autobiographical narration.

This genre has also become popular among the Lowland Slovaks, who gradually bear witness to their lives and diverse cultural endeavors. We must not forget the fact that individual Lowland communities have their own identity of Lowland Slovaks, which is the result of not only auto-identification but also recognition or acceptance by the surrounding other-ethnic communities. The issue of identity, however, requires reaching into the collective memory of local residents from the past. It is important to draw on their life stories, everyday and festive moments, interpret their assessments and opinions, and thus understand their complex view of the world.

<sup>3</sup> LYNCH, K.: Inscribing the early modern self: The materiality of autobiography. In SMYTH, A. (ed.): *History of English autobiography*. Oxford : Cambridge University Press, 2016, p. 56.

<sup>4</sup> See for details: FONIOKOVA, Z.: Fictionality in factual narrative. The case of fictional meta-autobiographies. In *Česká literatura*, 2018, Vol. 66, No. 6, p. 841-869.

<sup>5</sup> TARANENKOVÁ, I.: Písať o sebe, písať seba. K podobe slovenskej autobiografickej literatúry v 19. storočí. In TARANENKOVÁ, I. (ed.): *Podoby autobiografickej literatúry 19. storočia*. Bratislava : Kalligram – Ústav slovenskej literatúry SAV, 2012, p. 680.

### 3. Identity attributes in the background of Lowland space-time

One has to mention the suggestive review from the English philosopher Julian Baggini (of the prestigious publication *The Philosophy of Autobiography*; edited by Christopher Cowley, 2015, University of Chicago Press), who in his assessment of the history of identity in terms of development and continuity, stated that: „*The origins of this conception of the self can be tracked back to at least John Locke in the seventeenth century. Locke argued that a person was individuated not by the substance that made them, be that matter or an immaterial soul, but by its psychological features. A person, he argued, is a thinking intelligent being that has reflection and can consider itself as itself, the same thinking thing in different times and places. This is often called the psychological continuity view of personal identity.*“<sup>6</sup> Every person - both as an individual and as a member of (their) community - thus creates and manifests his or her identity throughout life. Its complexity „... *is always composed of several components - identities - and their contexts. Ethnic, religious, local, cultural and socio-professional identities are universally found in every environment of the communities of the Lowland Slovaks. They appear alternately, situationally - depending on the particular situation, moreover, most of them at the same time.*“<sup>7</sup> They are interconnected and provide a breeding ground for the genre of autobiography itself. In it, the most significant manifestation - in a given chronotope - belongs to its own village and to the local community. It is also related to religious identity and identification that determines almost every human activity. The geographical conditions of the Lower Land also determine to some extent the individual's job classification. In addition, he/she also creates a cultural identity that is firmly attached to the attributes and parameters mentioned. In the case of the Lowland Slovaks, it expresses membership of the Slovak, Lowland and local culture. Naturally, these features also overlap in the autobiographical texts of selected national revivalists at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries.

The Vojvodina environment in the period of *Matica slovenská* and before the First World War was rich in cultural movements; Báčsky Petrovec became the center of the cultural life of the Vojvodina Slovaks in those decades. This lively atmosphere was also created by personalities who are still remembered to this day. One of them is the national revivalist and writer Albert Martiš, who lived all his life in the Lowlands and is „... *considered to be the first Lowland Slovak novelist.*“<sup>8</sup> His „...*generational affiliation was manifested also in the literary follow-up to post-romanticism and to the pioneer of Slovak Lowland prose of the Matica period, Félix Kutlík.*“<sup>9</sup> At Martiš, this was first manifested by the fact that he started to introduce Yugoslavian themes and motifs into literature, but in his later work he focused on contemporary issues with a slight inclination to the home environment. In a sense, he was a kind of predecessor of Ján Čajak. In this symbolic cultural chain of Slovak literature, his work thus functions as a sort of clasp.

<sup>6</sup> BAGGINI, J.: The philosophy of autobiography. In *Life writing*, 2019, Vol. 16, No. 3, p. 497.

<sup>7</sup> LENOVSÝ, L.: Kolektívna pamäť a lokálna identita dolnozemsých komunití. In AMBRUŠ, I. M., HLÁSNIK, P., PASCÚ, B. (eds.): *Svedectvá slovenského dolnozemského bytia – aspekty zo slovenskej dolnozemskej kultúrnej histórie a kultúrnej antropológie*. Nadlak : Vydavateľstvo Ivan Krasko, 2012, p. 174.

<sup>8</sup> ANDRUŠKA, P.: Národnostné (a národné) literatúry ako realita súčasných kultúrnych kontextov alebo Prvá úvaha o „transylvánskej mačke“. In ANDRUŠKA, P. (ed.): *Dolnozemske podoby slovenskej kultúry*. Nitra : Univerzita Konštantína Filozofa v Nitre, 2007, p. 92.

<sup>9</sup> HODOLIČOVÁ, J.: Život a dielo Alberta Martiša. In HRONEC, V. (ed.): *Autobiografické črty a poviedky*. Báčsky Petrovec : Kultúra, 1996, p. 15.

## 4. Albert Martiš as a representative of the autobiographical genre in Vojvodina

The relatively later phase of the literary development of the Slovaks in Serbia (i.e. since 1880) coincides with the constitution of artistic prose of a realistic focus, whose representative was also Albert Martiš as a „...pioneer in depicting the ethnic color of the Slovak Lowland environment. In relation to nationwide prose, his work can be typologically determined as a regional variant.”<sup>10</sup> Albert Martiš was literally active in the years 1878 - 1918, so by this time limitation he was directly connected to the years of realism as a literary period. Through his comprehensive activities, he joined the Hlasisti movement (named after the journal Hlas - Voice) that set out to spread awareness, education and Slovak consciousness. The village people became the main inspiration for his literary works. In this chronotope he cultivated tales (especially short forms) with various variations. He was a teacher in Padina; he wrote stories and dramas, tried to write a novel, and contributed letters and articles to contemporary Slovak periodicals.

He was born on April 20, 1855 in the Slovak-inhabited Bačka village of Kulpin (father Peter Martiš, mother Apolónia Franková - she came from a family of teachers in Kysáč/Kisač). His family created a cultural atmosphere in which young Martiš grew (along with two siblings). Already as a nine-year-old he had to help his parents (his father in the shop and his mother with sewing). His father often changed jobs, opened a tavern and shop, but he was not able to manage them, so he later started teaching (in Bingula, Bačka Palanka and Hajdušica). When his father was a teacher in Syrmian Bingula, the pastor Juraj Jesenský noticed the boy's talent and convinced his father to let him study. Young Albert passed the entrance examination to the Serbian gymnasium in Novi Sad in 1867. In the upper classes he was taught philosophy by Jozef Podhradský, a prominent representative of the Vojvodina Slovaks. When asked about his nationality, Martiš answered that he was a Slovak. (Identification of national identity as the starting point for autobiography.) The beginnings of his literary work date back to the gymnasium in Novi Sad. It is interesting to note that he also contributed to the handwritten school magazine Sloga (Concord), which was written off in six copies; he published a translation of the Slovak legend Chory král' (Sick King). During his two-year studies in Novi Sad (1867 - 1869) he began to become involved in the cultural and national (minority) life of the Lowland Slovaks. In 1869 he went to Novi Vrbas, the lower German Evangelical Gymnasium (1869 - 1873; his parents were again convinced of the usefulness of studying at this school by Slovak Karol Zvaríny; he completed the second to fourth grades), in which professor Michal Godra, an important cultural factor of Vojvodina Slovaks and at the time the director of this gymnasium, instilled love for his mother tongue. However, he lived mainly at the mercy of the families where he was eating free of charge. Later, he also drew inspiration from his experiences for his short stories (Nevďačná Švábka - Ungrateful Swabian, 1916; Pomsta študentov - Revenge of the students, 1917 etc.). He decided (again under the influence of Karol Zvaríny) to go to the newly opened normal school (preparandum) in Prešov, transferred from Nyíregyháza, which accepted students free of charge. The Slovak pupils established a student association, Napred (Ahead, 1874), which was (symbolically) a spark for Slovak awareness. During the summer holidays of 1874 and 1875 Martiš went to supplicate (i.e. collect money for the school) in Slovakia. It was a lifetime experience for him: he wrote down his travel experiences in a diary, which today is of value not only as documentary material, but also as autobiographical memories written at a high literary level. He passed his teacher's examination in Szarvas (1877; a year before he was a teacher in Hajdušice). In the same year he was employed as a teacher in Padina and got married. His first wife Jozefina (born Garayová), the daughter of an evangelical teacher in Bácsky Petrovec, died in 1888, leaving two children behind: Mariena (born 1878) and Ján (born

<sup>10</sup> HARPÁŇ, M.: *Zápas o identitu*. Nadlak – Bratislava : Vydavateľstvo Ivana Kraska a Vydavateľstvo ESA, 2000, p. 37.

1883). After his wife's death, Martiš remarried (1889) - married Antónia Skyčáková, a native of an Oravan Catholic family, converting to the Evangelical faith, but living in Novi Sad with whom he had eight children; only three remained alive: Oľga (b. 1900), Ľudmila (b. 1901) and Pavel (b. 1903), who later continued his father's educational and translation work. Albert Martiš also wrote until his death (thirty years of fruitful writing). He was also one of the most strenuous Lowland Slovak contributors to contemporary periodicals (he was also published in the American press, especially in calendars). In the years 1878 - 1918 he published more than 200 texts: articles, translations, children's works, sketches and short stories - especially in magazines and proceedings such as Brankovo kolo, Cirkevné listy, Dolnozemský Slovák, Dom a škola, Javor, Ľudové noviny, Národné noviny, Národný hlásnik, Obzor, Slovenské listy, Slovenské pohľady, Slovenský denník, Slovenský týždenník, Stražilovo, Tranovský evanjelický kalendár, Včelka, Zornička, Živena. However, his texts were sporadically published also in book form (they were published mainly posthumously).

In Padina Martiš spent forty years of fruitful national awareness-raising work (he also subscribed to the Národné noviny - National newspaper). He worked as a primary school teacher in the years 1877 - 1894. At the same time, he also performed useful edification activities: he read to the Padinans at Thursday markets in front of the parish or school, on the loft, in front of the municipal house, at his house, in their house and at the pub. He then followed up on the readings he had brought to the Slovak consciousness. He attended individual Padina families, carrying out a major revival mission amongst them. He also taught Slovak songs - often accompanied by his own piano playing, founded a reading room (1880) and Vzájomná pomocnica (Mutual Help, 1885, later renamed Savings Bank as a branch of Pančevská banka). In addition, he still had connections with Slovak revivalists in Slovakia. Since „...*despite the warnings and threats he did not cease his revivalist work, he was persecuted, reported to the school supervisor, had up to twelve political trials, hindered in every possible way.*“<sup>11</sup> In 1895, however, he retired ... The last years of his teaching were continually pestered by the attacks of the evangelical pastor Gustáv Bujkovský, who was bothered by Martiš's national cultural activities. After Bujkovský's death (1895), a new evangelical pastor, Ľudovít Doeschall, came to Padina, also a renegade and an enemy of Martiš, who obstructed his efforts (for example, he had him expelled from the church - much like the notary from the municipal committee). As a Slovak revivalist, he did not receive recognition from the official and formal authorities, quite the contrary, and therefore faced many inconveniences and struggles. It is interesting to note, however, that he achieved awards in the economic field: he cultivated hops and silks; he was engaged in beekeeping, viticulture and the cultivation of spleen roses. He received a silver medal for his exhibited hops at the World Exhibition in Paris, and a bronze one for his hollyhock (1889). At the Millennium Exhibition in Budapest (1896) he won a bronze medal. From the Emperor Franz Joseph I he received a large medal for merit in the field of agriculture. In addition, he promoted the establishment of a new Slovak base from which to support writers, scientists and artists. Martiš was therefore full of initiative and very innovative in economic and technical matters - he recognized technical progress. However, his impracticality in business matters did not result in much financial gain from his ideas and efforts.

In 1915, Albert Martiš became ill with kidney and bladder disease. On the one hand, illness, but also the general unfavourable conditions and the dearth of the World War, caused Martiš and his family to experience a great shortage. It is sad that: „*All his life he was striving for the well-being of the Slovak people of the Lowlands and paradoxically in the last months of his life he literally suffered from hunger.*“<sup>12</sup> However, he worked literally until his last breath. He succumbed to his severe illness on September 19, 1918. His funeral was on September 21, 1918; he is buried in Padina in a common grave next to his first wife. Most Slovak magazines reported his death, highlighting his selfless work for the good of the people.

<sup>11</sup> ORMIS, J. V.: K životopisu Alberta Martiša (doplnok jeho autobiografie). In ORMIS, J. V. (ed.): *Pamäti dolnozemskeho učiteľa*. Martin : Matica slovenská, 1937, p. 105.

<sup>12</sup> JANČOVIC, J.: *Pretvorili dolnozemske rovinu*. Martin : Vydavateľstvo Matice slovenskej, 2012, p. 116.



## 5. Contours of Martiš' autobiographical prose and their literary reception

Albert Martiš received attention of a literary-critical nature by Pavel Bujnáč only at the end of his life, in which the reviewer briefly assessed the writer's work of this Lowland author.<sup>13</sup> Even Ľudmila Podjavorinská (true, just posthumously) wrote a short biography of his life in *Národné noviny* (National Newspaper).<sup>14</sup> Even behind these facts, Andrej Sirácky's introduction to his collection *Hriechy mladosti a iné rozprávky* (Sins of Youth and Other Tales), 1933) states that Martiš is unjustly forgotten. In the following decades it was (in principle) no different ... Michal Babinka (only) published a study of his life and work in 1953 in *Nový Život* (New Life).<sup>15</sup> Ján Kmeť briefly arranged and defined his literary work in the overview of the history of Slovak literature in *Vojvodina - Literatúra vojvodinských Slovákov*.<sup>16</sup> Recently, Michal Harpán, Peter Andruška and (especially) Jarmila Hodoličová have noticed Martiš's work.<sup>17</sup> In addition, it is gratifying that the encyclopaedic entries of Albert Martiš are found not only in various publications, but also in *Dejiny slovenskej literatúry* (History of Slovak Literature itself).<sup>18</sup> All biobibliographies agree that he was a pioneer in depicting the ethnic colour of the Slovakian Lowlands environment.

He was an author who authentically knew the life of the Lowlands environment and its people. In the background of his literary work we can characterize that range from short stories through dramatic work to attempting a novel. In the background, Martiš's literary performances can be divided into several groups: short stories, work with Southern Slavonic themes, dramas, attempted novels: *Tiene a svetlo* (Shadows and Light), works for children and youth, translations, articles from various fields.

His most valuable literary work is his own documentary biography entitled *Pamäti dolnozemskeho buditeľa* (Memoirs of a Lowland revivalist, Matica slovenská, Martin, 1937), which Ján Vladimír Ormis signed (as if it were his own book), who however only edited the manuscript: he presented the biography in an abbreviated form, while evidently striving to preserve the meaning and character of the prototext. Thus, in many places, this curriculum is an eye-catching depiction of the everyday life of a man from the Lowlands. Albert Martiš did not finish his own biography, he stopped in full swing on the 66th page (out of five intended sections, unfortunately he could not even complete the third). It is from this text that Martiš' fearlessness - even boldness - can be identified to tell everyone the truth to their face. A short excerpt from the prototext was published in *Národné noviny* immediately after his death by Ľudmila Podjavorinská (she also added some of her remarks to the text). Excerpts from the autobiography were also published by Ján K. Garaj in *Slovenské pohľady* (Slovak views, 1927-1928). Martiš's memories are perhaps the only Slovak memoir about those days from the Lowlands and therefore are of an exceptional value. They are of great importance not only

<sup>13</sup> BUJNÁČ, P.: Albert Martiš – poviestkár. In *Národné noviny*, 15.6.1918, Vol. 49, No. 69, p. 2-3; *Národné noviny*, 18.6.1918, Vol. 49, No. 70, p. 2-3.

<sup>14</sup> PODJAVORINSKÁ, Ľ.: Albert Martiš 1855-1918. In *Národné noviny*, 19.10.1918, Vol. 49, No. 123, p. 2-3; *Národné noviny*, 22.10.1918, Vol. 49, No. 124, p. 2-3.

<sup>15</sup> BABINKA, M.: Albert Martiš, život a dielo. In *Nový život*, 1953, Vol. 5, No. 1, p. 67-85.

<sup>16</sup> KMEŤ, J.: *Literatúra vojvodinských Slovákov*. Bratislava : Rozmnoženina Ústavu zahraničných Slovákov Matice slovenskej, p. 71.

<sup>17</sup> See also: HARPÁN, M.: *Zápas o identitu*. Nadlak – Bratislava : Vydavateľstvo Ivana Kraska a Vydavateľstvo ESA, 2000, p. 32-38; ANDRUŠKA, P.: *Súčasní slovenskí spisovatelia z Vojvodiny*. Nitra : Univerzita Konštantína Filozofa, 2010, p. 41-52; HODOLIČOVÁ, J.: Dolnozemský buditeľ Albert Martiš (1). In *Nový život*, 2015, Vol. 67, No. 11-12, p. 43-49.

<sup>18</sup> For example, see publications such as: *Encyklopédia Slovenska III*. Bratislava : Veda, 1979, p. 505; *Encyklopédia slovenských spisovateľov I*. Bratislava : Obzor, 1984, p. 411-412; *Encyklopédia dramatických umení Slovenska 2*. Bratislava : Veda, 1990, p. 37; *Slovenský biografický slovník IV*. Martin : Matica slovenská, 1990, p. 94; *Slovník slovenských spisovateľov Dolnej zeme: Juhoslávia, Maďarsko, Rumunsko*. Bratislava : ESA, 1993, p. 35.

for the history of Padina itself, but also for the Slovaks in Serbia. Martiš is a quick narrator in them, and his lively fantasy is also reflected in them. This work is actually „...a vast record of what he experienced, an engaging description of an intellectual evolution, the awakening of his national, in his masculine age very poised character .... Martiš' sharp pen captured in several sketches the characters and conditions of those whom he met in his life. Namely, the moments of his student life are valuable in the history of our hindered development.“<sup>19</sup> It's a text in which Albert Martiš „...tells the stories of life, and the story flows so smoothly from his mouth and so easily from his heart that it even excites admiration ...Martiš does not narrate read things, but his own experience.“<sup>20</sup> Pavel Bujnák says that „...almost everywhere you see a writer reading his works, you feel his closeness, you feel that he is with you that he wants to lead you ...“<sup>21</sup> After all, Ľudmila Podjavorinská praises Martiš's comprehensive cultural activity, saying: „Appreciating Albert Martiš as a tireless worker, we should put the effort he has made in the field of Slovak writing in the first place.“<sup>22</sup>

Albert Martiš' autobiographical prose, which is of a high artistic standard, is therefore part of the memoir literature. It is in them that he best proved himself as a writer. These texts have a more or less documentary character, giving not only their life, but also the environment, social situation and prominent cultural workers of that time. In *Memoirs of a Lowland revivalist*, one can see how the educational, moral, and labouring character of the Padina teacher was created; he speaks clearly and engagingly about his childhood, his years of study, and particularly his experiences with supplicating.

## 6. Biographical aspects in short prose by Albert Martiš

For his short prose, he drew inspiration from his childhood and student years, contemporary life, animal life, surrounding nations and nationalities. Based on these facts, we can say that autobiographical prose is an integral and important part of his literary work. They are divided into childhood and student years (*Demikát* (*Demicate* – a soup made from bryndza), *Nevďačná Švábka* (*Ungrateful Swabian*), *Noc medzi hadmi* (*A Night Among the Snakes*), *Pamäti dolnozemskeho buditeľa* (*Memoirs of a Lowland revivalist*), *Pomsta študentov* (*Revenge of the students*), *Suplikantské kúsky* (*Supplicant pieces*), *Všeličo z cesty* (*Anything from the roads*)) and stylized third person narrations (*Božie cesty* (*God's Path*), *Prvý hriech* (*First syn*), *Skrižované cesty* (*Crossed roads*), *Stará rozprávka* (*Old tale*), *Ujcov román* (*Mister's novel*), *Známy rukopis* (*Known manuscript*)).<sup>23</sup>

The tale named *Night among the Snakes* with its thrilling story and its extremely exciting narration arouses fear from the perceptive reader, just as the real survival of this incident by little Martiš, whom his parents allowed to sleep at night in the “vineyard cottage” in Ilok at his request. The environment of sniping snakes and squeaking rats and mice, with a terrible thunder and storm, is the expressive basis of the story. He presented his experiences from the gymnasium in Novi Vrbas in two prose works: *The Ungrateful Swabian* and *The Revenge of the Students*. He described one inhuman deed of a rich Swabian woman, whose greed was felt first hand, in the prose *Ungrateful Swabian* (true, with a humane legacy). Also in these autobiographical works are Martiš's educational tendencies and moralizing inclinations, which were also reflected in the prose *Revenge of the Students*, in which the young ones take revenge for the professor's supercilious relationship towards them (with sad consequences). Based on our own reading

<sup>19</sup> PODJAVORINSKÁ, Ľ.: Albert Martiš 1855-1918. In *Národné noviny*, 19.10.1918, Vol. 49, No. 123, p. 2-3.

<sup>20</sup> BUJNÁK, P.: Albert Martiš – poviestkár. In *Národné noviny*, 15.6.1918, Vol. 49, No. 69, p. 2-3.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>22</sup> PODJAVORINSKÁ, Ľ.: Albert Martiš 1855-1918. In *Národné noviny*, 22.10.1918, Vol. 49, No. 124, p. 3.

<sup>23</sup> About more details of Albert Martiš's prose works see: HODOLIČOVÁ, J.: Dolnozemský buditeľ Albert Martiš (1). In *Nový život*, 2015, Vol. 67, No. 11-12, p. 46-47.

experience, we can say that in the short - autobiographical prose of Albert Martiš, one can also encounter factual elements, which are also present in stylized third-person narratives, which are also often personal experiences. In the prose Mister's novel, the novel speaks to the youth that comes together in his house about his first love (in fact, it was Martiš' first love). In the Old Tale, the writer's mother talks about poor parents who send their son Janko to schools. It is through his diligence and honesty that he not only becomes an attorney, but also acquires the hand of the daughter of his principal (magisterial, director).

In terms of journals he also published several stories and sketches with autobiographical motifs. These are most often based on the memories of travel by the author himself. It describes its own significant path along the contemporary modern railway, and the individual villas and cottages along it. On the basis of this fact, it contrasts the poor and rich worlds (also) on the basis of national attributes (bald-chinned, moustacheless, antipathic Swabian versus rich but lazy Serbian). He describes his journey to Pest or Cegléd in the background of lucky coincidences; however, the meeting with Slovaks is slightly criticized (as if they were ashamed of their origin and language). The allusion to teacher Michal Godra, then professor of the gymnasium in Novi Vrbas, is the subject of individual memories, recollections and suggestions. Novi Sad is mentioned as a certain cultural centre of the youth of Albert Martiš, his contact with the „slovakness“ of Jozef Podhradský. A separate sketch is devoted to the author's supplicant „spells“ - not only disappointments and inconveniences, but also cheerful events during his purposeful wandering. As a supporter of the Tisza evangelical normal school, he describes the „manorial begging“ and merry events in thirteen counties (from the Zemplín county stretching from both the banks of the Tisza to the Danube). His journey is interwoven by singing „our nice Slovak songs“, contaminated by Hungarian and German, or meeting with the „really“ Lowlandish people. The incident with a silent Slovak is interesting, who in the Lowlands got chased fifty-two times to stand before the nobility for his Slovak belief. In this chronotope, the words „patriot“ and „patriotic sentiment“ mean something else, even special. The superficiality of school teaching and education is also described, while the arrogant tone of the time is evident: those who have no money, let them not study and go to work in industry. The Slovak element is (in)directly present in the families. This is one of the reasons why the conscious Slovaks strive to raise good people in a nice language - even at their own expense without state aid. The text mentions philanthropy, a collection at (sic) the casino and (kind of) endowments. In this context, Martiš said the following: „Many bad but more good impressions almost every supplicant carries with him into life. I have so many of them that I could write whole books about them“<sup>24</sup> The sketch describing the memory of young Martiš' horrific night among snakes is extremely expressive. On the other hand, it indicates the child's desire for freedom and especially for the beauty of God's nature. The night spent in the family vineyard is - as we mentioned earlier - characterized by terrible darkness: rain, whirlwind, thunder, bangs, frightening lightning and extraordinarily large mice. The huge snake beside the body of a young boy in light summer robes in the open air is described in a particularly interesting way. After all, the story carries an important didactic attribute in which parents' sacred words will become decisive in the future.

The memory of family poverty drags the writer up to his adulthood. He wanted to learn at the gymnasium, but his father needed to put him to craftsmanship. Nevertheless, Martiš - thanks to the parish' and teacher's help - could study. Thus, the complex mental and physical „hunger“ of a young person is accentuated. The author describes in more detail the memories of his student years (for example about family meals). However, his ego is permanently heard internally, dissatisfied with his social status, and so - as the only option - he turns to God: „Lord! Why have you made me poor, that I am forced to eat spongy bread!“<sup>25</sup> Suffering for the inexorable behaviour of the ungrateful Swabian is basically ambivalent, based on the real state.

<sup>24</sup> HRONEC, V.: *Autobiografické črty a poviedky*. Báčsky Petrovec : Kultúra, 1996, p. 71.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 77.

Criticism against peasants will in the future (in the adult life of Martiš) transform into a slight criticism of the Padinians, because „...for almost forty years I live among people of bacon like character who does not understand the beauty of nature and therefore does not grow forests but corn for greasy pigs.“<sup>26</sup> The memories of student times are quite comical, acts of revenge from the students in the gymnasium are age-appropriate. It describes the rigor of professors and their different approach to Martiš - the Slovak, who pronounced even Hungarian words softly. In fictionalized texts, parents are also mentioned, of course, with respect and awe - also with autobiographical features: the mother as a tailor prepared a silk wedding suit and the father as an unsuccessful craftsman was given a job as a tutor. It was a real parent world for the child, endowed not by simple fairy tales, but by the life-drawn stories of his own mother. Her desire for education was concretized in the character of a son, who gradually gained (himself) a reflection both of the world and of his parents. The young boy is grateful to the nurturing four-leaf clover of mother - father - teacher - pastor; he avoids carouses, reads, thinks, interprets. Everywhere, however, he remains (to a certain extent) hurt by his own and the surrounding poverty. It is true that he loves his surrounding Slovak people, so he attaches his mind and actions to them as a future medic, lawyer (even a teacher) who wants to work; he basically subscribes to Pan-Slavism (he reads and spreads *Národný hlásnik* (National Announcer Magazine and other Slovak periodicals; condemns the libel against a notable man, scholar and „our honoree“ Jozef Miloslav Hurban), but symbolically honours the Basilica of Esztergom. He realizes that God's ways are inscrutable, but truthful. However, they leave behind some remains - like pressure sores on feet one gets from tight shoes. What is important here are certain parentheses in the text in the form of short lectures by learned „misters“ and their anecdotes about the Bernolák or Štúr period. The events of the last - third - wandering after passing the school are already marked by the life experience of a young person. The young supplicant likes to meet people who sing songs they have heard from Štúr himself. At the same time, Martiš relentlessly hears about the life of the contemporary multicultural Pressburg, where naturally Slovaks, Hungarians, Germans, Serbs, Croats and others meet. Along the way, he gets to know his first love – the faithful Slovak Marka, to whom he accentuates the importance of the connection of heart and reason. He visits Slovak houses with his wards where: „They heard short history of Slovaks, history of Slovak literature, good and bad characteristics of Slovak people, about work for the people, and especially they sang there, at an old, often out of tune but resonant piano, unheard folk songs...“<sup>27</sup>

In his student novel, Martiš describes the life of a young hero who devoted himself entirely to his studies in Prešov. In doing so, he wrote poems about the beauty of Slovakia, the Slovak people, their language, the singing of rosy-cheeked Slovak girls. The main character, like Martiš, is a poetically attuned idealist. He turns not only to God, but also to a girl – a Slovak. In the fictionalized autobiographies of Albert Martiš, faith meets love, while the East Slovak dialect blends with beautiful pictures of the surrounding nature. Thus, the contamination of languages helps the colourful period (however, Slovak is lagging behind, since its teaching is absent even at school). In the narrative concept, however, a Slovak boy and a Ruthenian girl share a common grandmother-Sláva. The body associates with the soul, while the surrounding nature in their chronotope is their natural, even idyllic witness: „...in one day sunbeams lure more grass and flowers out of the ground than in the prosaic Lowlands they do in one week, because Highland rocks collect the life-giving warmth of the sun quicker than the dense, heavy clay of the Lowlands.“<sup>28</sup> In this way, the author gradually becomes convinced that it is necessary to pray to God, to listen to parents and elders. Only good education makes a human human. In this way, the fate of the Padina teacher in a large Lowland village is concretized: „He instilled

<sup>26</sup> HRONEC, V.: *Autobiografické črty a poviedky*. Báčsky Petrovec : Kultúra, 1996, p. 76.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 109.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 126.

*the love of their condition to future peasants, and painted in vivid colors how beautiful the peasant state was, so every pupil wanted to be a peasant. When he vividly described the state of craftsmanship, everyone wanted to be craftsmen ... he was a teacher not only at school, but also in life...*<sup>29</sup> Even so was the Lowland teacher and writer Albert Martiš, who worked and educated, spoke and wrote - also texts with autobiographical motives in which, as in life, he followed the ten commandments of God under all circumstances. After all, as he put it: *„Everything has been fulfilled, except that I have not become a „great gentleman“, but only an ordinary village teacher.*<sup>30</sup> And perhaps that is even greater ... Based on the above facts, we can therefore express a thought that Albert Martiš had and still has a well-deserved place among national revivalists and Lowland economic workers. He was a practical master-educator, economic pioneer, national revivalist and writer. I mean, a man who deserves our attention - even one hundred years after he left us.

## 7. Memoirs of a Lowland revivalist as an important milestone in the autobiographical genre

From the point of view of (auto) biographical attributes, the most significant work of Albert Martiš is his own biography, which he began writing on June 24, 1913; he continued it during the First World War. This work is his most important literary work. It describes the circumstances, based on an axiom, that he was born from April 19 to April 20, 1855. It gives basic information about his parents. He portrays his father as rational; an emotional mother who wiped his child's tears and read nice fairy tales. He describes his childhood as quite lonely, during which the beginnings of the creative path of the man appear. However, he criticizes the Kulpin school, especially the lack of systematic teaching. Additionally, he learned the basics for practical life from his teacher-mister: he learned to instill, collect weeds, catch ground squirrels, observe goldfinches. In the background of his childhood flights, however, are always present his mother's fairy tales, which *„...had a great influence on my upbringing and on my later character.*<sup>31</sup> Gradually, the child becomes a young person who has to help earn bread at home and listen not only to his parents but also to the pastor. The combining of these two elements were the roots so that young Albert Martiš could go and study. He has described his other years at the German Folk School with respect and humour, where *„...I caught up with some things that I had missed and my merry-go-round character inherited from my father began to wake up in me.*<sup>32</sup> His period at this school is interwoven with fabrics and thoughts about fairy tales and legends or certain male and female ideals that, naturally, later disappeared into the wide world of slippery life areas. It describes the significant influence of the Kolényi family not only on young Albert but also on his whole family. However, the gradual rationalization of his life as a young person will only take place during his student flight to the Novi Sad and Novi Vrbas gymnasiums. From the reader's point of view, the entrance exam to the gymnasium is interesting, during which the Slovak identity of Albert Martiš is unambiguously crystallized (a Slovak-Lutheran from Kulpin I am, and a Slovak I will remain to be). From his point of view, student life is described in good and bad terms: learning philosophy or gradually opening up to not only the sanctuary of science, but also his own poor conditions. Cyclically, the text revisits the simple folkish childhood legends that help Albert Martiš gain the attention not only of his professors but also of his classmates. Naturally, he criticizes his strict teachers, but later when writing his autobiography, he comes to the realization that they themselves, as gymnasium students, weren't worth much. His

<sup>29</sup> HRONEC, V.: *Autobiografické črty a poviedky*. Báčsky Petrovec : Kultúra, 1996, p. 131.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 96.

<sup>31</sup> ORMIS, J. V.: *Pamäti dolnozemskeho učiteľa*. Martin : Matica slovenská, 1937, p. 10.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.



cultural talents were also supported by passionate visits to the local theatre, which helped him to become vigorous and opinion-forming. Thanks to this, he could not be seduced from a national perspective. The micro-story about Albert Martiš's meeting with Viliam Pauliny-Tóth (he kissed his hand, and Pauliny-Tóth asked if the young boy is a Slovak) reads effectively. In addition to these official meetings, Martiš lived his student life with vacations, contributions, theatre visits and early smoking. That was perhaps one of the reasons why he had to repeat the first grade ... but later he was able to do so thanks to conscientious teachers (of e.g. the evangelical religion). One can see here the foundations of his later methodology, emphasizing practicality, concretization and understanding. It was his evangelical teacher who: „*spoke his lectures with the fairy tales of life I still remember today. When I became a teacher, I also took that method from him.*“<sup>33</sup> Of course, there are also comical statements about educators; Martiš comments, ridicules, satirizes, truth be told, with the necessary insight and the psyche of a high school student. In the background, he characterizes a person who: „*...was a noble Slovak soul, only to be pulled away; after leaving school he became nazarene, fed pigs and disappeared somewhere in silence.*“<sup>34</sup>

Albert Martiš also describes the occasional visits of his parents by a steam boat when they moved to Bačka Palanka (his father became a teacher there). Happy youth culminates especially in Novi Vrbas, where young Albert finds friends with whom to bath, catch snakes or crayfish, catch fish on a rod and collect bird eggs. The German gymnasium in Novi Vrbas also mentally influenced the young person with Slovak roots: there the famous Slovak Michal Godra taught, a well-known representative of Slovak Lowland literature. Albert is gradually getting closer to reading fiction, which helps him to realize and confirm his own nationality. However, derogation for a certain panslavism led to his being persecuted for many years. He criticizes chauvinism and renegade behaviour, proclaims a slight Slovak belief and the need for peaceful coexistence: it is worthwhile singing both the Hungarian poem *Talpra magyar* (Arise Hungarian) and the Slovak *Kto za pravdu horí* (Who Burns for the Truth). At the same time, the surrounding nature becomes a faithful companion to the young gymnasium student: „*I enjoyed learning in God's nature at that time, and as a teacher I taught my children many times on the turf, and with good results. In the grove, in the woods, it would have been even tastier, and even so at the rattling brook. I recommend it to my willing gentle brothers.*“<sup>35</sup> In national affairs, Martiš only woke up in gradual stages, looking for some kind of contact with the conscious Slovaks: „*Pastor Šimon Beniač began to teach me about Slovak national affairs, which I thought were quite natural, and I could not ensoul myself for it. Yes, I was wondering then, or a year later, how my father could, getting a newspaper in which Sládkovič's death was announced, cry for a total stranger.*“<sup>36</sup> Martiš' journey to Prešov to normal school - a teaching preparation (including a steamship or a classical or even a horse railway at the end of August 1873) is described using local colours. It was a school transferred from Nyíregyháza - and renewed; it started with four students. In his autobiography, Martiš gives a relatively detailed description of the people and the conditions of the school, highlighting in particular the forty thousand books contained at the library of the College, which he also used to its full extent. He learned Hungarian and German, but learned nothing about Slovak. Even then, he wanted to become a Slovak teacher, and therefore with his classmate begged the nobility to be able to learn Slovak. In addition to this difficult process, he mentions the way he reached his Slovak consciousness, which „*...must be cultivated in the receptive soul of youth, as a weak plant, which if left unchecked by the frost, the sun, etc., will if not completely perish, then fall behind in growth.*“<sup>37</sup> In Prešov's normal school, young Martiš encounters a comparison of the Highland

<sup>33</sup> ORMIS, J. V.: *Pamäti dolnozemskeho učiteľa*. Martin : Matica slovenská, 1937, p. 22.

<sup>34</sup> ORMIS, J. V. (ed.): *Pamäti dolnozemskeho učiteľa*. Martin : Matica slovenská, 1937, p. 23.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31-32.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37.

and Lowland people in Slovakia, while en bloc vigorously defending Slovakness and becoming a fearless Slovak. He criticizes a professor who makes a mockery of Slovaks; he seeks support in a teacher from Sarvaš, who naturally has an understanding of the matter. In fact, we can express the idea that Albert Martiš has matured to become a conscious Slovak exactly whilst at normal school. There he also met with the significant Lowland cultural activist and writer Gustáv Maršall-Petrovský, who had already – there and then – grouped Slovak youth around him. Thanks to him, he confirmed his knowledge of how children should be raised and taught. He opened the gate of Slovak literature; a sign of this is his effort to visit the famous priest and writer Jonáš Záborský in Župčany.

Albert Martiš also describes interesting events during his supplication. It was a life school for a young person, beneficial both materially and mentally. It happened with events that were also recorded in diary form. Comically, he describes the sharp Hungarians in Hortobágy or around the town of Márianosztra, the drunkenness of taverners and their efforts to tipsify the supplicant (in their eyes, young Albert Martiš is a Lowlandish sot, who knows what is good though). During his journey, he meets ardent Slovak men and awakened Slovak women. It warms his heart, but he also recognizes other nations and nationalities - with a background of tolerance. However, he has a special position among the Lowland Slovaks because he comes from Kulpin, where „*our Paulíny*“ was elected as a deputy. He criticizes the closure of the Matica slovenská and secondary schools, emphasizing the soulfulness and need for Slovak poems. The culmination of this idea is Martiš' visit to Jozef Miloslav Hurban at the parish in Hlboké, as: „...*my greatest desire, as a Slovak, was to get to know him and bow to him, he shook my hand and kissed my forehead. I stayed there for three days and three nights. A lot, he told me a lot ... about Slovak affairs and about his activities, especially in the revolution of 1848 – 1849.*“<sup>38</sup> In this chronotope, Martiš also praises nature and compares the surroundings with his native land - while his heart remains in the Lowlands: „*It was a region for me where nature was showing up in all its magnificence, the forests were breathing healthily, and the potatoes were so tasty - not like in the Lowlands, where they are watery, tasteless - that I'd rather eat them than a roasted liver and yet I accepted a station in the Lowlands, breathing prose, and not in the poetic Highlands...*“<sup>39</sup> He describes his conscientious preparation for a teaching exam in his parent's home, where he found peace and possibilities. Successfully mastering this difficult life trial led Martiš to teach the first mixed folk class in Padina. However, he taught a half more hours, walked through the village, got to know the minds, morals and customs of the people and spread the National Announcer, in which he often wrote under pseudonyms. He felt great among his trustees, but: „*It is very difficult to work and seriously teach and teach children well, and even harder to raise them properly. With this and such conviction, I entered among the progeny, in which I loved the people, the Slovak nation, and loving the entrusted children, I put myself into the dust so that they could understand me.*“<sup>40</sup> In his school practice, Martiš returns to the fairy tales he considers extremely efficient from the didactic point of view. He will spend twenty years of his productive life in Padina, where he teaches Slovakness, and therefore he was indicted more than fifty times before a school supervisor and secular court. However, the whole neighbourhood knows that Martiš is hardworking, that he plies and lives nicely with the entrusted, he gives them newspapers and books, i.e. culture. He also meets with the parents of children, sowing spoken and written sophistication, of course, in the spirit of tolerance: „*If I were a teacher in a German community, I would spread civilization in German language by magazines and books and in Hungarian language among the Hungarians.*“<sup>41</sup> His memories are occasionally spiced up with allusions of adults who often got drunk in the village, became unfaithful, played cards, lazed, planned revenge. However, the author's efforts to correct them are evident from the text.

<sup>38</sup> ORMIS, J. V. (ed.): *Pamäti dolnozemskeho učiteľa*. Martin : Matica slovenská, 1937, p. 58.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 62.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 70.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 75.

Gradually, his attention turns to women and wedding. He describes the courting of his upcoming Petka, to whom his growing respect and later love is evident. The description of the Lowland wedding preparation is again effective from a reading point of view. It emphasizes mutual understanding, but also marital life - for the nation. Thus, in 1879, the Red Cross Association was (also thanks to them) established, in 1885 a monetary institution. The Martiš family said they wanted to raise self-confident people out of their children, not slaves or double-dealers. It is important to know (according to them) the child's soul and its magic nature. At this point, the parent and teacher roles combine and meet. Martiš' memories thus represent a valuable testimony not only of his personal history, but especially as an example of the life of a Lowland Slovak, changes in his identity, work duties, or leisure and other diverse activities. Other aspects of Albert Martiš' autobiography are also noteworthy: „...the image of a childhood in a Lowland village, interethnic contacts in a multi-ethnic environment, teacher's life, characteristics of the local conditions, of the human types, the village atmosphere, the peculiarity of the struggle for preservation and presentation of Slovak national identity with tendencies towards Magyarization, whose bearers were mainly evangelical clergymen, teachers or other members of the intelligence with a Slovak origin.“<sup>42</sup>

The dynamism of Albert Martiš's life in Padina was also crystallized by the fact that in 1883 he began to grow silkworm (so that he reached a record in sericulture in villages throughout Hungary), he cultivated Martiš's „gallows“, namely hops, in 1897 he invented a corn chopping machine and in 1897 a flying machine in the manner of Zeppelin, not with a propeller, but on four wheels. So he worked not only with his spirit but also with his hands. He was also a useful man in the field of journalism and literature (in 1885 he began writing treatises in the National Newspaper; in 1888 he sent his first novel to Slovak Views, that Svetozár Hurban Vajanský published without corrections). Thus he gradually became a writer who - according to him - should have a general education and must also understand academic science.

## 8. Autobiography as a future perspective – conclusions and possibilities of further research

Overall, autobiography as a genre has not only its historical roots and concretizations, but also a perspective. Contemporary man receives from autobiographical texts both objective and subjective information, which enriches him/her and gives him/her a credible picture of older times. He/she recognizes the wider and narrower public surroundings and times, which were similar and different (perhaps even odd). A special space is (also from this aspect) the Lowlands, in our case Vojvodina, where, as mentioned above, at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries were already given testimonies of being and living. These were also autobiographies written by the Lowland cultural representative Albert Martiš. He was a man who acted, helping the people and the communities: how to bring them to prosperity. For this reason, we can say that Albert Martiš did not live in vain and left behind texts that are worthy of reading and interpretation even in today's world. His fictional and autobiographical texts are thus proof of the agility and peculiar colour of the period. Martiš's versatile activity was, and is, evidence that even outside the mainstream Slovak culture (Bratislava, Martin, contemporary Budapest and others) there were „hotspots“ of education and literary activity. Even today, their prototexts give room for interpretation, analysis, evaluation, reading concretization - that is, opportunities for further research are open. In this way, the tradition of the past, the analysis work of the present and the perspective of the future combine.

<sup>42</sup> KMEŤ, M.: *Historiografia dolnozemsých Slovákov v prvej polovici 20. storočia*. Kraków : Spolok Slovákov v Poľsku, 2013, p. 146.

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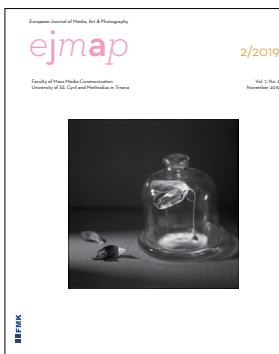
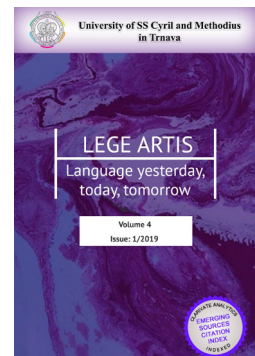
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Acta Ludologica is a scientific journal in the field of digital games. The journal contains professional scientific reflections on digital games; it also offers academic discourses on games, especially media and digital competencies, creation, design, marketing, research, development, psychology, sociology, history and the future of digital games. Acta Ludologica is a double-blind peer reviewed journal published twice a year. It focuses on theoretical studies, theoretical and empirical studies, research results and their implementation into practice, as well as professional publication reviews. The members of the journal's editorial board are members of the Faculty of Mass Media Communication of the University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius in Trnava, the only faculty in Central Europe which has registered three scientific journals in Clarivate Analytics (formerly Thomson Reuters) Web of Science.



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