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Resurgence

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It has been nearly three years since the last stand-alone, dedicated Canadian Communication Association (CCA) Graduate proceedings published as a collaboration between the CCA Graduate Representative(s) and *Stream.* In recent years, graduate publishing has been combined with graduate student conferences in Canadian communication and media studies, leaving a gap for proceedings from Canada's largest communication studies scholarly association: the CCA. It is in this journal that we turn the page to new journeys which come from the practice of previous habits and values to ensure writing opportunities for communication studies graduate students in Canada. The art of writing is an iterative process which needs practice. As Chokshi (2021) shows us, writing allows us to formulate our thoughts. In practice, it increases our critical thinking skills and allows us to formulate ourselves as thinkers and creative individuals. Research demonstrates, however, that graduate students face grave uncertainties in learning about the writing process and how to further have their scholarly work published in academic journals (Hurrell et al., 2024). Many students face uncertainties about where to publish, how to publish, and if they are 'ready' to publish. These uncertainties are exasperated when indirect peer support and peer networks are unavailable, which unfortunately, is not uncommon in new work-from-home culture which continues post-pandemic. It is in this loss of peer networks which might organically grow in offices which students face another uncertain challenge in their professional development through fewer opportunities for 'off the cusp' conversations about academic publishing with their peers. By publishing academic conference proceedings, this gap is reduced allowing for a resurgence of professional development within the Canadian communication studies field.

In this collection, we see resurgence as a common theme across the presented pieces. Zanco demonstrates how refugee women are visually represented, contextualizing such photographic imagery in a long history of humanitarian aid photography. Alternatively, Kowlessar shows how we can reimagine common perceptions of what is media and remix media to fit new public policy goals such as media literacy initiatives by using traditional board games like *Monopoly*, thereby reducing the spread and impacts of misinformation and disinformation. Nyela further demonstrates that resurgence of cultural practices, such as her example with African hair braiding, can have deep-rooted senses of culture, activism, and a living archive

within one person's being but that these histories ought to first be acknowledged. Further articles in this special issue weave together past practices with future visions which demonstrate that most things are not new but are instead the resurgence of past practices in modern times. It is this review of the past and application to the present which Canadian political economy theorists emphasize as key to dissecting power (Innis, 2008; Winseck & Pike, 2007).

It is with great pleasure that I present this special issue. Readers can be sure of critical theory applied throughout the articles presented. I would like to extend my dearest thanks to the *Stream* team for making this issue possible. As well, deepest gratitude to the peer reviews for taking time out of their schedules to offer feedback to the authors of this issue's articles. It is through this volunteerism as service to profession which graduate students might benefit from professional development as supercharging their later careers.

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"And in those days shall men seek death": The Ecstatic Truth of Spectres in *Little Dieter Needs to Fly*

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Abstract:
Documentaries are strongly associated with ideas of truth and fact, so when a documentary has a complicated relationship with truth, the category of "documentary" is challenged. By exploring foundational theoretical writings on documentary from the likes of Bill Nichols alongside Herzog's beliefs, this paper examines not just Herzog's position within the documentary canon, but also the existing understanding about the construction of truth within documentaries. As case studies, the paper examines one of Herzog's films which, on the surface, fits within the category of documentary: *Little Dieter Needs to Fly* (1997) utilizes re-enactment and re-telling, which places authority of voice on individual testimonials rather than the director, asking audiences to believe an individual is being truthful in order to accept the narrative as fact. Both re-enactment and re-telling have complicated and well-studied relationships with documentary truth, and so they serve as cogent grounds to explore the theories that Herzog suggests in his Minnesota Declaration, and challenge the relationship between truth and fact.

Keywords:
Documentary truth; re-enactment; spectres; Werner Herzog

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In 1999, Werner Herzog shared his "Minnesota Declaration" at the Walker Art Centre in Minneapolis, explaining the filmmaking principles he uses to create his documentaries. In it, he critiqued the cinema verité movement for conflating "fact and truth," two facets of filmmaking that Herzog explains are vastly different: "fact creates norms, and truth illumination" (Herzog, 1999, para. 8). Facts are statements, truths are understanding. For Herzog, facts are useful, but truth remains the more powerful of the two within the realm of filmmaking and storytelling. He says:

> There are deeper strata of truth in cinema, and there is such a thing as poetic, ecstatic truth. It is mysterious and elusive, and can be reached only through fabrication and imagination and stylization. (Herzog, 1999, para. 9)

Because of this, Herzog's films are highly fabricated and stylized, toeing the line between fiction and nonfiction. Throughout Herzog's works, the ecstatic truth is a spectre floating through his storytelling, and through techniques like retelling and reenactment, this spectre is revealed, particularly in the space between the events being depicted and the depiction of them. This space is uncanny, and in it, the spectre of ecstatic truth is allowed to exist as a result of Herzog's storytelling techniques.

In *Little Dieter Needs to Fly* (1997), Herzog follows Dieter Dengler as he recounts and reenacts moments of his life, particularly his story of being shot down over Laos during the Vietnam War, where he was held captive and tortured. This paper will reveal how, because of Dieter's own relationship with spectres, Herzog's principles about filmmaking impact the story being told in *Little Dieter Needs to Fly*. The film attempts to represent that which is unrepresentable, ultimately creating a spectral relationship between truth and fact, and past and present, that illuminates the ecstatic truth.

Herzog's division of truth and fact is critical to understanding his filmmaking, and Elizabeth Cowie's chapter "Narrating the Real: The Fiction and Nonfiction of Documentary Storytelling" (2011) provides an illuminating comparison to Herzog. Cowie explores truth as "not a quality or meaning that is immanent in realty; rather, it is an effect of human discourse" (2011, p. 26). She explains that "the 'true meaning' of reality lies not in what we see and hear, or touch, but in our understanding of reality organized through our symbolic systems" (Cowie, 2011, p. 26). For Cowie, truth exists when our sense experience of reality is filtered through something like language: for instance, your experience of seeing a tree outside is not a truth, but your statement, "I saw a tree outside," is. Herzog, contrarily, would disagree with Cowie; for Herzog, the statement "I saw a tree outside" is not a truth, but rather a fact. This distinction is important for Herzog:

We must ask of reality: how important is it, really? And: how important, really, is the Factual? Of course, we can't disregard the factual; it has normative power. But it can never give us the kind of illumination, the ecstatic flash, from which Truth emerges. (Herzog, 2010, p. 7)

For Herzog, facts and reality are of secondary import to his pursuit of ecstatic truth. Cowie acknowledges that documentaries are never a perfect representation of reality, as they are deliberately constructed by the filmmaker through the choice of what to film and what not to film, how the footage is edited, sound design and scoring, and the metatextual framing of the narrative (Cowie, 2011, p. 38), but Herzog takes this a step further through his deliberate fabrication of facts that further illuminate the truth that is being presented, and neglecting facts that don't. (Other documentarians may do this as well, but, to my knowledge, none quite so openly as Herzog.) By shaping the facts that he utilizes, Herzog exerts a profound control over the story being told, forcing us to, potentially, question its truthfulness.

Herzog's filmmaking is unique, and one of the most identifiable aspects of his documentaries is his contribution to the voiceover narration. While other documentarians utilize a voice-of-God narration style to "forward truths from a position of authority" (Plantinga, 1997, p. 101), Herzog is clearly opposed to this movement, as his narration style rarely grants himself a position of over any other narrator within the documentary. Further, the "truths" that Herzog suggests in his narration are typically much closer aligned with what he would call facts. His narration style, rather than suggesting a greater universal truth, provides access to his, or his fellow narrator's, perspective. For instance, *Grizzly Man* (2005) shows Timothy Treadwell's perspective through archival footage alongside Herzog's own perspective in voiceover, as well as the perspectives of the people around Treadwell who experienced the events being depicted (Herzog, 2005). Since Treadwell is no longer able to share his own perspective directly to us, his beliefs and presence in the perspectives of the others takes the form of yet another spectre, shaping the final presentation of the story despite being presently visible.

The simplest way that we as an audience are granted access to a perspective in documentary is through the use of narration, which recalls Otway's "distinction between the implied author and the narrator in a given story" (2015, p. 5):

Although a narrator often relays the story to the reader either as a personified character in the diegesis of a text or as a disembodied voice that exists somewhere outside the story world, the narrator is not the author of the story. The implied author is the image that a reader conjures of the agent who invents the story text, an image pieced

together from inferences derived from how the story is told. … It is the implied author who organizes the story's plot and decides how to arrange story events in time. (Otway, 2015, p. 5)

While this consideration is often utilized in discussions of unreliable narrators, the distinction is useful in spaces where the reliability of the narrator is not called into question, since the implied author or filmmaker is always behind the scenes structuring the way in which the narrator is presented. In his films, Herzog often takes on a double role, shaping both the structure of the story, and lending his voice to its telling. As the implied (and literal) filmmaker, he is actively involved in the ordering of the narrative, and presents the other narrators, like Dieter in *Little Dieter Needs to Fly* (1997), in particular ways. Despite it being Dieter's story that is being told, Dieter himself is not the one structuring its telling: he has handed ownership of this story to Herzog.

Herzog's meddling with the world that he is presenting us in his films utilizes various techniques that can all be considered "fictionality." In short, "fictionality is present whenever a piece of communication signals its own imagined nature" (Iverson & Nielsen, 2016, p. 251), which does not make a text fictional, but rather amplifies the rhetoric of the nonfiction. For my purposes, "imagined nature" includes the complicated space of memory, as individual memory is such an unreliable source of information. This is not to say that memory is imagined, but rather that memory lends itself closer to fabrication than "facts" about "reality." Reenactment, dream sequences, hypotheticals, and performance are all examples of fictionality:

Fictionality is a flexible means that can be used for a variety of purposes. It holds no prescribed deliberative value in and of itself, and is neither necessarily good nor necessarily bad. But whatever it is, it is not escapist and not a way of turning one's back on the world. … Instead, fictionality serves as a means to guide our interpretation and understanding of non-fictional events. (Iverson & Nielsen, 2016, p. 260)

Fictionality is a tool that is used within both fictional and nonfictional storytelling, and its use serves to support the narrative that is being told. As Herzog outlined in "The Minnesota Declaration, "facts sometimes have a strange and bizarre power that makes their inherent truth seem unbelievable" (Herzog, 1990, para. 7), and so they need the support of fictionalized elements to reveal the truth within. As such, Herzog's pursuit of ecstatic truth relies on the use of fictionality, and he often uses the techniques listed above in his films. Everything in Herzog's films is carefully selected and shaped to fit the truth that he is hoping to reveal, including the people who speak

to camera in traditional documentary interviews, who are selected "as though he is casting for a fiction film" and are given cues and direction as they shoot and reshoot their answers (Akçali & Çakirlar, 2016, p. 58). By directing what happens in front of the camera and choosing the shot that best represents the fact that Herzog wants to show, he is fabricating a version of reality. This example of fictionality contributes to the pursuit of ecstatic truth. As the implied author of the story, Herzog's presence in the telling, even when his voice is not heard, haunts the story.

While Herzog has used many different types of fictionality in his filmography, the one that will be considered here is reenactment, as it most obviously contributes to a spectre-like presence in the storytelling. Nichols (2008) says that documentaries that utilize reenactment "take past time and make it present" (p. 88), and as a result, "a spectre haunts the text" (p. 74). He explains:

> Unlike the contemporaneous representation of an event—the classic documentary image, where an indexical link between image and historical occurrence exists—the reenactment forfeits its indexical bond to the original event. It draws its fantasmatic power from this very fact. (Nichols, 2008, p. 74)

What Nichols calls the "fantasmatic power" of reenactment is caused by the uncanny gap between the representation and the "real" historical event, and is a form of fictionality: a recording of the real does not exist, so there cannot be a representation of the type of documentary truth that relies on an indexical relationship, and it must be fabricated. An indexical relationship suggests that what we are presented is *the* representation of what happened in reality, but reenactments instead present *a* view "from which the past yields up its truth" (Nichols, 2008, p. 80). This form of fictionality presents a world through a very particular view, which fits well within Herzog's storytelling techniques, since his own perspective is always present in his documentaries. His use of reenactment, then, allows for other perspectives to fit alongside his own, like Dieter's, as he directs the creation of these moments. The reenactment is a spectre of the original, and by haunting the text, it provides a particular perspective on an event that we no longer have access to. This is just one of the multiple perspectives that contribute to the full, ecstatic truth when the story being told is so temporally distant from the telling.

Dieter is haunted by war. He was born in a small town in the Black Forest in Germany that was bombed by Allied forces during World War II, and it was this experience, during which he made eye-contact with an Allied pilot, that encouraged him to fly (Herzog, 1997). Beyond this, and even after his rescue, Dieter lives his life dictated by the looming presence of war: "In present day California, [Dieter] is already

preparing for the next catastrophe, evident when Herzog has [Dieter] reveal his vast reserves of food and water in the crawl space beneath his house" (Fay, 2013, p. 248). Dieter "lives under the spell of disasters past" (Fay, 2013, p. 249), and this spectral figure is what motivates his forward movement, including his creation of the documentary reenactments. While running through the jungle again, he says, "running like this may chase the demons away" (Herzog, 1997). This admission about the presence of demons and memories from his time in the Vietnam War shows us that war haunts him, and he is looking for a way to escape that spectre.

Another spectre haunts him as well: Death. The opening shot of the film shows Dieter rejecting a large artistic representation of Death approaching on horseback as too inaccurate to be tattooed on him (Herzog, 1997). This tattoo is meant to depict the hallucinations that he saw near the end of his journey through the jungle, but he says that the hallucinations didn't include Death: "Death didn't want me" (Herzog, 1997). Because this image fails to capture his hallucination properly, an impossible task, Dieter rejects it. Later in the film, Dieter discusses how a bear began to follow him through the jungle at one point, and says, "This bear meant death for me, and it's really ironic, the only friend I had in the end was Death" (Herzog, 1997). This contradiction about whether or not Death was (metaphorically, via hallucination, etc.) present during this time of Dieter's journey is less important than the continued importance of the figure of Death for Dieter. Death is an ever-present figure in Dieter's retelling, even as Dieter survives this event. This spectre is also connected to the spectre of war, as they both seem to follow him through his life, and he is incapable of escaping their pressure on him.

The moment in the tattoo parlor serves another purpose, and its inclusion is our first indication of Herzog's implied authorship of the story being told: it forces us to question Dieter's access to accurate memory. The presence of hallucinations in the time that he is recalling for us indicates that the narrative being told is, potentially, factually inaccurate, but Herzog's filmmaking principles show us that while the testimony may be questionable in moments, the truth of the story is intact, and is supported through techniques like the use of archival footage. Herzog's narration later in the film remarks: "How Dieter Dengler has been able to cope with all this remains a mystery. He hides behind the casual remark that this was the fun part of his life" (Herzog, 1997). Herzog is revealing his own position here: he does not understand how Dieter has survived this experience and the spectres that it has left on him. And yet, Herzog sees the ecstatic truth of life and death within this story, and so the telling of it, facts or no, as valuable.

This film utilizes both reenactment and retelling in order to narrate the story, and while the two techniques are similar, they function differently within the film. Most of the film is comprised of retelling, with Dieter's voice, or occasionally Herzog's, describing the events, often directly to camera. Even though this isn't a reenactment, this holds the "uncanny sense of repetition of what remains historically unique" (Nichols, 2008, p. 74) that is described as existing in reenactments. The recreation of an event through retelling does not perfectly recapture the event that it is articulating, and so the space between the event and the telling creates a spectre all the same.

To establish a comparison, let's consider for a moment *The Act of Killing* (2012), another film that utilizes reenactments of torture scenarios (Oppenheimer et al., 2012). In this film, we follow Anwar Congo, a gangster who was a critical part of the Indonesian mass killings of 1965-66, as he proudly recounts his experiences during that time in fictionalized reenactments that fit into the Hollywood genre films that Congo was such a fan of. In *The Act of Killing* (2012), "it is fairly obvious that the reenactments performed in minute detail by the real perpetrators of their past deeds work as testimonies and documentation of actual deeds" (Iverson & Nielsen, 2016, p. 257). In these reenactments, Congo participates by playing one of their victims. In one scene, we see Congo blindfolded and tied to a chair, with a wire wrapped around his neck, which is pulled (gently) by a colleague. Congo is visibly uncomfortable, and has to take a break before the shooting can begin again. Later in the film, after watching recordings of the reenactments, Congo tearfully asks if his victims felt that same panic, to which Oppenheimer responds, "They felt worse. You knew it was a film. They knew they were going to die" (Oppenheimer et al., 2012). As he contends with his actions through this film, Congo is haunted by his past, and this reenactment forces him to face this spectre head-on.

Dieter, on the other hand, is contending with trauma that was inflicted upon him by people like Congo. As the reenactments begin, Dieter directs the group of Laotian actors around him to tie him up, but when they do, he remarks, "Uh oh, this feels a little too close to home" (Herzog, 1997). Herzog, in voice-over, mirroring Oppenheimer's comment to Congo, interjects, "Dieter new it was only a film, but all the old terror returned, as if it were real" (Herzog, 1997). This moment of reenactment, with the group running through the jungle, seems to be the only moment of true reenactment that Dieter was willing to engage with, opting for retellings of his moments of captivity and escape instead (Herzog, 1997). Rather, he uses the people and places around him as props as a lecturer would, gesturing to various tools and methods that his captors would use in order to amplify his testimony. Nichols (2008) observes:

> Neither Dieter nor Herzog seek to render suspense dramatically or
> verisimilitude perfectly. … Going through the motions takes on a
> formal, ritualistic quality that nonetheless spans the moment between
> before, when need prevailed, and after, when these social gests
> function as signifiers of what was but is not, at the moment of
> signification, past. (p. 83)

Both Dieter and Herzog seem more interested in narrating the events rather than actually reliving them, and so the spectral, uncanny gap between past and present is all the more noticeable. Dieter never reacts as openly emotionally as Congo does, and yet the impact of this event and its retelling is evident in the presence of Dieter's spectres as he revels in the comfort of a field of planes: a love of which was born of war and death.

Little Dieter Needs to Fly (1997) is constructed of a brief prologue followed by four chapters: "I. The Man," which establishes a present-day Dieter in his California home; "II. His Dream," which describes his childhood in Germany and his need to fly; "III. Punishment," covers most of the reenactment and retelling about his experiences in Laos; and "IV. Redemption," which narrates his rescue. These chapter titles, inserted by a silent authorial voice that we can assume is Herzog, present an interesting interpretation of Dieter's story. Dieter, in his own story, does not present his experiences in Laos as a punishment, and a rescue is not the same as a redemption, but these titles may suggest something interesting about Herzog's positionality. Herzog, like Dieter, is a child of Germany during World War II, and has seen the effects of air raids like the ones that Dieter participates in in the Vietnam War (Mitcheson, 2013, p. 357; Fay, 2013, p. 251). Dieter explains the horrible conditions that his family lived in after his town was bombed, and yet he fails to recognize that his own actions in the Vietnam War would cause the same needlessly violent results (Fay, 2013, p. 253). While I'm not suggesting that Herzog is saying that this is justification for Dieter's experiences in Laos, calling this section of Dieter's life "Punishment" could hint towards a critique of Dieter's naïveté. "Redemption," then, could be Herzog recognizing that now, separated from it all, Dieter has learned.

From the use of Revelation 9:6 as the opening epitaph of *Little Dieter Needs to Fly*, the spectres of war and Death haunt Dieter, and in the additional postscript added to the film after 2001, Death has finally caught up. We see through shaky, hastily framed footage, Dieter's military funeral, where the spectre of war looms still, as a squadron of F14s fly over his final resting place. Through this film, we can see Herzog's pursuit of ecstatic truth through the pursuit of spectres: the spectres that haunt Dieter, and the spectre created by the space between past and present

considerations of events. By connecting ecstatic truth to spectres in this way, it is aligned with them, and by displaying the power of these spectres, Herzog shows yet again that true power of cinema is in failing to represent the unrepresentable.

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Virtual Influencers and Intimacy

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Abstract:
Social media influencers are pieces of successful online marketing campaigns. As they have become more expensive to employ and harder to exploit brands and advertisers have ceded power over the field of advising to them. In a bid to recoup some of that power and lower marketing expenses, some brands now work with virtual influencers—computer animated characters used as replacements for human influencers. However, for virtual influencers to be successful product spokespeople they must first be able to develop the kinds of intimate relationships with their followers that make human influencers so effective. To do this, virtual influencer creators make use of pre-existing genres of influencer content. These genres give virtual influencer creators a platform to build their characters off of and represent a set of user expectations for what influencer content is. If virtual influencers appropriately meet or subvert these expectations, social media users will see them as viable replacements for human influencers. Further easing users' development of intimate relationships with virtual influencers is a generalized understanding of digital avatars as representatives of singular human users. Though corporate teams operate most virtual influencers if users associate the digital avatars they see in online social spaces with single individuals, then users may assume, tacitly or otherwise, that virtual influencers also represent a single human and are thus someone users might have a relationship with. Here, I examine the role of genre and user preconceptions in encouraging social media users to develop intimate relationships with virtual influencers. To do this I analyse four of popular virtual influencer Lil Miquela's Instagram posts through the lens of literary criticism and affect theory.

Keywords:
Virtual influencers; social media; affect theory; intimacy; Instagram.

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As far as the advertising industry is concerned, social media influencers live or die by their ability to cultivate intimacy (or the perception thereof) with their followers. More than the number of followers, likes, comments, or other common social media metrics, the intensity with which followers bond their selves to their favourite influencers is the mark of influencer success. Their intimacy generating abilities make influencers powerful brand partners—as users who feel more intensely connected to an influencer are more likely to act on the influencer's purchasing advice. A smaller influencer with a group of more highly affected followers is worth more than the largest population of dispassionate observers (Tafesse & Wood, 2021; Wies et al., 2022).

At the same time, influencers represent an existential threat to brands, as many consumers now place their trust in their favourite influencers' recommendations, and not the brands who make the products they purchase. Seeing an opportunity, tech entrepreneurs have stepped in to offer a solution to this problem: virtual influencers.

Making Virtual Influencers

Virtual influencers are digital avatars created using common 3D-animation software (New York Magazine, 2018; Lawn, 2021) and deployed as replacements for human influencers. While AI tools maybe used in the development and creation of virtual influencers, virtual influencers are not AI their selves (Alexander, 2019) meaning they cannot act autonomously. Real humans work behind the scenes to plan, create, and publish all virtual influencer content and orchestrate any interactions virtual influencers have with any fellow virtual influencers, followers, and human influencers.

While I do not want to lose track of the virtualness of Miquela's being nor the real humans working behind-the-scenes, I frequently use humanizing langue when referring to her throughout this essay. This is not to give Miquela the air of self-direction, but to put my analysis of Miquela in-line with discussion of other fictional characters. Most often, critics of fictional works refer to the characters in a text *as human* even though the characters are nothing more than a sequence of words or images presented to read as such to the audience. In discussions of fiction it is often awkward and unnecessary to restate the character's fictitiousness once that fiction is initially established.

Virtual influencers fictitious nature is also the reason why I do not believe discussing the authenticity of virtual influencers is necessary to our understanding of

them. In influencer studies, authenticity is used to describe how close an influencer's performed persona is to their supposedly 'real' offline selves (Marwick & boyd, 2011). While researchers like Abhinav Choudhry and co-authors (2022) have found that social media users find virtual influencers less authentic than human ones, I question whether measuring the authenticity of virtual influencers the same way we do human influencers is appropriate. The affective powers of fictional characters are not tied to how well they represent their creators, but by how well they represent a an abstract human ideal. This abstraction means audiences can still read characters with exaggerated or overly simplistic character traits as relatable figures. In fact, the flattening or expanding of human experiences in fiction can make fictional characters more relatable as things like melo-drama may feel closer to near universal experiences like heartbreak than the often quieter less dramatic arcs these emotions take in real life. Empathetic and skilled writers can, and are in fact expected to, create authentic characters who have little to no resemblance to their embodied experiences. The fact is that Miquela is an authentic representation of the kind of person she represents. Miquela's explicit fiction subverts followers' expectations of authenticity in influencer content and encourages them to evaluate her on the same rubrics they use other fictional characters. Given that human influencers also often invent public facing personas or play characters, it may be worth re-thinking how we talk about authenticity in influencer studies more broadly as well.

Virtual Business

Compared to their human counterparts, virtual influencers allow brands much tighter control over content ownership, partnership specifics, brand safety, and direction of consumer trust. Virtual influencers are also more flexible than traditional brand mascots, since they are not tied to a specific brand or product line but represent the 'brand' of the influencer's own tastes and recommendations. Virtual influencers achieve these goals in a relatively straight forward way—they replace a human intermediary who go between a brand's products and consumers with a character the brand has full control over. However, to be successful replacements for human influencers, virtual influencer creators must also be able to develop a sense of intimacy between their characters and the social media users who follow them. Creators of popular virtual influencers like Lil Miquela have been able to do just that.

Miquela is a virtual influencer owned and operated by the LA-based tech firm. She currently has 2.7 million followers on Instagram and is estimated to have pulled in as much as USD$1 million in for her owners, Brud, Inc., in 2022 (Steele, 2022). Miquela is far from the only virtual influencer on Instagram, but she remains one of the most well-known virtual influencers, having appeared in advertisements for big-

name brands such as Prada and Calvin Klein (Allwood, 2018; Petrarca, 2019). Throughout her career, Miquela has been represented by big name talent agencies such as William Morris Endeavor and Creative Artists Agency who have helped Brud sell her advertising services to potential clients much like they would for any of the live humans they represent (Spangler, 2020). As the influencer marketplace has matured, the processes through which they create relationships with their followers has become rationalized and genre-fied. I argue that virtual influencer creators distill and employ rationalized genre conventions with the aim of fostering intimate and affective relationships between their characters and social media users. I use a textual analysis of Miquela's Instagram content, exploring how her posts conform to, resist, and expand upon two primary genres of social media. The two genres in question are: the relatable genre and the intimate genre, as defined by Akane Kanai (2019), and Tobias Raun (2018) respectively. Following this, I explore the ubiquity of digital avatars online encourage users to see digital avatars as affective figures, setting the stage for social media users to develop intimate relationships with virtual influencers. While it is unclear to what extent the existence of virtual influencers changes users' experience of social media, this article takes some steps towards building that knowledge by uncovering the goals of those who operate virtual influencers and the techniques they use to achieve their ends. To begin, I discuss why virtual influencers creators must develop intimate and affective relationships between their characters and social media users if virtual influencers are to be viable replacements for human influencers.

Intimacy as a Celebrity-Making Practice

While social media influencers are particularly good at developing intimate relationships with their followers, they are not the first media figures to seek out deeper relationships with their fans. Success as a media personality has relied on a performer's ability to develop a sense of intimacy with their audience since at least the Golden Age of Television. Horton and Wohl first identified the perception of intimacy audiences have with TV stars in 1956. They describe this experience—where the audience feels as if they know the media personality intimately, while the performer only knows the individual viewer as an abstract concept—as a parasocial relationship (p. 215). Media figures cultivate parasocial relationships by re-creating the *feeling* of a one-to-one interaction between the individualized audience members and a predictable and charismatic individual. Audiences strengthen their parasocial relationships via continued viewing of a particular show, as viewers repeatedly tune in week-after-week to 'spend time' with their favourite TV personalities and increasing their familiarity with and affinity for those performers (p. 216, 217). Today, internet-based communications tools and social networks have made it much

easier for would-be celebrities to cultivate intimacy with vast numbers of people. Instead of simply broadcasting to audiences in a conversational style, social media celebrities can directly interact and speak *with* followers in real time. This ability to actually converse with followers, alongside the presentation of "an easily consumable persona" and the disclosure of "personal information" serves to intensify the perception of intimacy followers have with social media celebrities (Marwick, 2016, p. 341). This perception of intimacy between social media users and online celebrities makes popular social media personalities valuable product endorsers. Thus, social media influencers emerged as an evolution of the celebrity product endorser, enabled by digital and networked technologies and increased significance of consumerism in everyday life.

Affects and Intimacies

Affect and intimacy are foundational terms for this essay, and I would like to define them here before moving on to the central discussion. Building off the work of Baruch Spinoza, Gilles Deleuze (1981/1988) tells us that affects describe the "transitive" passage from one state of existence to another (p. 48–49). Affects vary in intensity, duration, and their ability to "increase or diminish" the affected's potential to act (Hillis, 2015, p. 6). Affects are not self-actualizing, instead arising from the encounters between bodies, "bodies defined not by an outer skin-envelope or other surface boundary but by their potential to reciprocate or co-participate in the passages of affect" (Gregg & Seigworth, 2010, p. 2). In this definition, *affective* or *affecting* bodies trigger the existential transition of the *affected* body when the former encounters the latter. This is not a linear relationship, as bodies are at once affecting and affected, having a continuous and simultaneous, though not necessarily infinite, relationship with the bodies they encounter.

Deleuze (1981/1988) equates affects to "feelings," a comparison that is both potentially illuminating and limiting (p. 49). The term feelings suggests an individual's emotional experience of the present moment, a definition that fails to encompass all of what affect is. We must keep in mind that affect is the direct result of one body encountering another body or bodies; and that bodies constantly and repeatedly encounter other bodies, and therefore feelings undergo constant modifications and are not static. Additionally, as Brian Massumi (2002) argued, it is important not to confuse affect with emotion, where he defines emotion as "qualified intensity" (p. 28). Affect is inherently nonconscious and autonomic, only becoming emotion after the "conscious positioning" of affect in to a "narrative" (p. 24). In this way, affect is a bridge between emotional states, triggering a nonconscious and

autonomic response from encounters with other bodies which are in turn qualified into conscious emotions.

Intensity is a key term in Deleuzian-Spinozist affect theory, which Massumi introduces (2002) to describe the "strength or duration" of an affecting body's effect on the affected (p. 24). Massumi establishes the concept in his analysis of Hertha Sturm's (1987) research on audiences' emotional responses to media texts. In Sturm's study, children watched three versions of the same short film and the researchers measured the children's emotional responses to each version. As Massumi described it, relatively small changes in the film lead to significantly different emotional responses by the audience. The stronger or weaker the response, the greater or lesser affective intensity the text contained. Massumi's work suggests media images act on us in nonconscious ways, not at the level of ideological persuasion as the hypodermic needle model suggests, but at the level of affect. Media texts affect us before we ever have the chance to qualify our reactions into the narrative of emotions. Media, in this conceptualization, is a powerfully affective body.

Related, but not synonymous with affect, is intimacy. In some ways, intimacy is a means of communication between bodies; intimacy colours the affects experienced by the encountered bodies. As a communicative form, intimacy is inherently aspirational, pushing towards "something shared, a story about both oneself and others that will turn out in a particular way" (Berlant, 1998, p. 281). Like affect, intimacy exists on a spectrum, and the aspirations intimacy drives towards changes with its depth and intensity. Intimacy is also a relational process, where repeated interactions with a thing produces "something" which a person may come to "depend on for living" (284–285). In turn, the loss of intimacy is a devastating experience. In this way, intimacy becomes deeply connected with conceptualizations of a good life. One cannot live well if they live without intimacy.

Manufacturing Intimacies

Anecdotally, the people I have spoken with find it hard to understand how others develop intimate relationships with virtual influencers. Social media users are aware, even if tacitly (and increasingly explicitly as terms like 'parasocial relationships' become part of the popular lexicon), that human influencers seek to cultivate the perception of intimacy between their selves and their followers, and that influencers may present their selves in ways that are not entirely truthful to achieve that intimacy. Likewise, if virtual influencers are to be successful, they too must achieve this perception of intimacy with their followers, even if building that kind of

affective relationship with a fictional character may feel unintuitive to many social media users.

Discussing affective and intimate virtual influencer-follower relationships is difficult in part because of the inherent impossibility of knowing affect outside of firsthand experiences (Hillis et al., 2015, p. 12). Further, as Lauren Berlant (1998) noted, intimacies that do not conform to a monogamous romantic relationship, or the nuclear family (as well as intimacies that are too public) can seem "unimaginable," even to the individuals involved in them (p. 286). Research on virtual influencers finds Berlant's statement to be true for their followers as well. Abhinav Choudhry and coauthor's 2022 study exploring the reasons why Instagram users interact with virtual influencers was aptly titled "I Felt a Little Crazy Following a 'Doll,'" quoting a study participant who struggled to understand their own relationship with the virtual influencers they followed. While the authors of this study do not follow up on this statement, it makes it clear that relationships with virtual influencers do not fall within the broadly accepted "story" of intimacy (Berlant, p. 281). As such, it comes as little surprise that theorizing on virtual influencer-follower relationships to this point has avoided questions of intimacy, instead taking a market-driven focus (Arsenyan & Mirowska, 2021; Choudhry et al., 2022; Thomas & Fowler, 2021; Zalake et al., 2021).

Relatable Robots

There are characteristics of online life that have set the stage for these kinds of intimate virtual influencer-follower relationships. One of these is the relatability genre of online content. Akane Kania (2019) described this genre of online content as largely female-oriented, where social media users "produce an account of personal experience that assumes generality, and plausibly but pleasingly reflects this audience's experience in particular way" (p. 4). Even if the poster and the reader do not know each other, the relatability of the content produces a feeling of connection and community between the poster and the social media users who see the post. Often, this relatability comes from shared feelings of failure to achieve feminine perfection while attempting to remaining within reasonable proximity to it.

This, of course, presumes a shared understanding of what the feminine ideal is, and the ways individuals perceive their failure to live up to it. Creators make relatable content with a specific audience in mind, a "spectatorial girlfriend" who has a "shared knowledge of feminine popular culture, rules, conduct and sociality" with the poster and the poster's other followers. Relatable content calls on and reinforces a "normative sameness" of white, middle-class femininity, using this as a framework

for developing affective relationships between the creator and their followers (Kanai, 2019, p. 6).

Online creators forge a brand of relatability by appealing to the spectatorial girlfriend and a socially constructed feminine normativity. Creating content that pulls from a shared feminine knowledge means followers can find the content relatable even if they have not had the same "literal experience." Instead, the follower only needs to "be both literate in the same sorts of feelings, and *feel* the self into the same affective position" (Kanai, 2019, p. 133, italics in original). By creating content that is sufficiently general and attached to presumable shared knowledge the creator becomes "affectively representative of others" (p. 126).

However, the creator must not come across too broad. Content that is overly general comes across as a "desperate" means of attention seeking to users, stifling follower interest in the content (Kanai, 2019, p. 141). Instead, creators need to show some amount of individualism, and content should be specific enough to the creator for some of their own personality to show through. Relatable content should also present some form of resistance to normative femininity, as users see trying too hard to conform as unrelatable and undesirable (p. 36). The creator should present not only as someone followers *do* relate to but also as someone they "would *want* to relate to" via a low effort, approximate adherence to normative white middle class femininity, while displaying some individuality and a modest resistance to collectively agreed upon feminine norms (p. 126, italics in original).

Crystal Abidin and Eric Thompson (2012) noticed Singaporean blogshop models (young women who model and sell clothing via blogs) use similar strategies. While these models use displays of luxurious lifestyles to help make their products seem more attractive to readers, they simultaneously stress their "commonness in order to maintain readers' identification with them" (p. 472). By discussing their struggles with day-to-day tasks and avoiding the use of fashion magazine-style photo editing, blogshop models seem relatable to their readers. By presenting as relatable, the model effectively reduces the importance of any class differences between herself and her readers. Instead of seeming alienating to a middle-class readership, the model's elevated class becomes something to aspire to, and readers identify with a generalized desire to improve their social class and economic standing. The model then monetizes the readers desire to be more like her by selling them her wardrobe, encouraging readers to believe that mimicry of the model's self-presentation practices is the first step towards rising to her societal position.

While strategies like those used by relatable content creators and blogshop models can help influencers create a relatable online persona, they are not foolproof

tactics. Failing to seem relatable can have strong negative effects on an influencer's business, and influencers may struggle to identify the line between what makes them seem relatable and what does not before they have already crossed it. Often, simply self-identifying as an influencer (i.e., acknowledging their industry job title) is enough to generate "criticism or mockery" (Duffy & Sawey, 2021, p. 137). In some cases, taking brand deals or sponsorships at all renders an influencer unrelatable to their followers (Dunn, 2015).

This is all to say that characters like Miquela can be both fictional and relatable to followers at once. Human influencers are already fictionalizing their lives and using specifically tailored narratives to appeal to a broad audience. Virtual influencers can do that too. Believable and relatable characters are one of the components which elevates many of the best fictional stories above their mediocre peers. Writers are constantly playing with, into, and against the conventions of their chosen medium and genre in ways designed to create affective characters. Miquela's team, I argue, is doing that here too, adopting the stylings of the 'relatable' genre of social media content and reworking it to fit Miquela's character.

Figure 1: Love Plots - Miquela and her human boyfriend Nick seated at a café, extending the on-going romance plot played out through her social media content. (Miquela, 2022d, June 8).

Take Miquela's Instagram post from 8 June 2022 (Fig. 1). The image shows Miquela sitting on the lap of her ex-boyfriend, Nick. Both hold iced coffees in takeout cups while looking into the camera. The caption reads "Robot, Caffeine and Exes don't mix well… or do they?" The post takes on Miquela's perspective, identifying her as a robot and therefore non-human. Further, Miquela's unnaturally smooth skin, and slightly uncanny appearance also signal her inhuman nature. These features may turn off some social media users while, for others, the post walks the line between remaining general enough to feel relatable while also gesturing towards the specific individuality of the poster. Miquela's inhuman nature, specific locality and relationship do not subtract from the relatability of knowing when it is a bad idea to go on a coffee date with your ex, but still doing it anyway. Instead, these specifics ensure Miquela's post does not come across as desperate for attention, proving herself to be simultaneously *herself* and a relatable person.

At the same time, the visual qualities of the post play into key aspects of normative femininity. Her make-up look, hairstyle and outfit all signal her ability to present an appropriate and trendy version of adolescent feminine attractiveness. Her racially ambiguous skin tone and features and slim figure situate her within the specific female beauty standards preferred by Instagram users (Lavrence & Cambre, 2020). Additionally, the contrast of her idealized feminine beauty against Nick's heavily tattooed body positions them as part of the 'hot girl/alt guy' meta of the early 2020s, contextualizing them within a popular and much discussed relationship stereotype (O'Neill, 2021). The second image in the post tags several of the high-end brands Miquela and Nick are wearing, positing them as aspirational figures with access to trendy luxury goods.

By going on a date with her ex, Miquela admits to a failure of achieving feminine perfection. Instead of moving on to better things, she is falling back on previously failed relationships. By referencing this failure in a tongue-in-cheek way, she shows her followers she both knows what the rules around dating are for young women, and which of those rules she is allowed to break. At the same time, Miquela's adherence to aspirational and normative femininity prevents her from straying too far away from aspirational feminine perfection. All this works together to make Miquela someone users *want* to relate to.

One specific way creators make relatable content, as described by Kanai (2019), is through the evocation of the "best friend." Framing a piece of content as a discussion between best friends creates a simplified situation that is both recognizable and "indefinitely applicable" (p. 131). Followers get to feel like they are seeing the inside of a deep and intimate relationship between two best friends.

Alternatively, the followers may be addressed as the best friend, creating a more direct and intimate relationship between influencer and follower. The blogshop models observed by Crystal Abidin and Eric Thompson (2012) used "terms of endearment … as a form of 'girl talk'" (referring to the reader as "sweetie, babe, girl," etc.) when addressing their readers to create a sense of closeness and intimacy (p. 472). Instagram influencers further the best friend narrative by disclosing the kinds of details many people would only discuss with their closest friends, such as their dating life (Fig. 1) or moments of emotional vulnerability (Fig. 2) (Abidin, 2015). In either case, the portrayed friendships do not have to reflect the exact reality of followers' offline relationships but must by symbolic of a kind of relationship near enough to followers' that followers can identify with them. Like other kinds of relatable content, best friend posts continue to play into the normative feminine expectations of what aspirational friendship should look like, and the ways they can enhance one's own adherence to those norms:

> The close connections of girlfriendship to normative femininity are clearly seen in both the narrativisation of girlfriendship as a simple, universal and complementary relationship, but also sometimes in the way that the social and heterosexual capital that a best friend may provide is explicitly invoked as part of one's brand. (Kanai, 2019, p. 131)

Miquela's creators use this form of relatability to their advantage, giving her a best friend to play off of in the form of Bermuda (@bermudaiabae). Bermuda is a blonde provocateur, more in line with the brash luxury worship of millennial lifestyle influencers than Miquela's Gen Z cool kid stylings. She appears in Miquela's posts semi-regularly and is one of two other 'robots' connected to Miquela in her fictional canon (the other being her half-brother, Blawko). Miquela's post from 6 May 2022 (Fig. 2) is a good example of how the best friend subgenre of relatable content plays out on her feed.

In Figure 2, Miquela and Bermuda sit next to each other in an upscale bar. Both characters wear trendy and highly feminine night-out looks. The post's caption and comments reveal the occasion for the outing, framed as their shared remembrance of the event.

> *Miquela*: I don't know where I would be without Y'ALL!! My heart was soaring last night. Love you guys SFM!! 😭 4 more days…
>
> *Bermuda*: I had to try and make last nights celebration about me and it was EASY with that fit 🙆 congrats on the single though bestie!!! 💔 😗
>
> *Miquela*: @bermudaisbae LMAO I CAN'T.

Figure 2: Girl Friends - Miquela and fellow Brud virtual influencer Bermuda celebrate the upcoming release of Miquela's new music. (Miquela, 2022c, May 6)*.*

The exchange tells users Miquela and Bermuda were out celebrating the upcoming release of new music by Miquela. The two engage in some playful teasing and congratulations, confirming their status as best friends. Followers can identify with the situation—going out with a best friend to celebrate a life achievement, the playful jokes made in the other's expense, and a mutual benefit of increased heterosexual appeal each woman has on the other.

While these explicit displays of friendship allow followers an entry point into Miquela's life, slotting their selves into the role of one friend or the other, it is not the only way Miquela develops intimacy with social media users. Popular influencers have codified key storytelling and content creation techniques which predictably and repeatably illicit feelings of intimacy between their selves and their followers. On social media, intimacy itself has become genre.

A Recipe for Intimacy

The intimate genre of online content exists as a counterpart to the relatable genre. While relatable content benefits from its generality and ability to tap

into the affective properties of shared knowledges and experiences, intimate content is deeply personal. In their analysis of beauty and trans activist Julie Van Vu, Tobias Raun (2018) described intimate content as centring the 'actual' creator instead of presenting as a vague, reader-insert protagonist. While the creator presents an idealized and simplified persona for easy consumption by followers, the presentation leads social media users to believe they are seeing the 'true' life of the creator (Marwick, 2016, p. 341). Using this first-person, self-centric form of address, influencers communicate "thoughts, feelings and situations that seem (deeply) private and/or transgressive" while simultaneously "approaching [their] audience as intimate others." These characteristics have both become "anticipated by the audience" and endlessly reproduceable by influencers (Raun, p. 105).

This intimate mode of address is particular to online celebrities, running in opposition to the safer and more reserved ways mainstream celebs present in public (Raun, 2018, p. 104). Raun used two main labels to describe the ways influencers present in their content. The first is the "public private self," which exposes the more mundane, day-to-day aspects of the influencer's life. The second is the "transgressive private self," where the influencer displays the most vulnerability and shares their most private experiences (p. 106).

When presenting the public private self, creators address their followers "directly and inclusively as 'you' and 'us,'" and they may look "straight into the camera" as if speaking to the person on the other side of the screen (Raun, 2018, p. 106). Here, Kanai's (2019) spectatorial girlfriend reappears, as the creator speaks to and presents as "available for and interested in conversation with a network of sympathetic (primarily female identified) others" (p. 106). This builds towards the sense of an easy interaction with someone followers are comfortable with and invested enough in to care about their daily (perhaps unexciting) activities.

The transgressive intimate self pushes things further. In this mode of presentation creators may share images of emotional breakdowns, or details about traumatic experiences. Creators may also discuss or display sexuality and the body in both celebratory and self-critical ways as part of this presentation of self (Raun, 2018, p. 107). Followers do not see this as oversharing or undesirable behavior, instead using these moments to develop deeply intimate connections with the creator. As Jenny Kennedy (2018) explained, this kind of secret-sharing and personal disclosure is a key component in the development of fulfilling relationships and failing to overshare may signal a lack of dedication or interest in the relationship (p. 271). Just as individuals come to expect oversharing in their offline intimate relationships, so too do they online.

Miquela's post from 9 February 2022 (Fig. 3) is an example of displays of the public private self. In the image she lounges in a park with an unnamed friend. Both women hold popular self-help books and the captions reads, "BRB bettering myself 😬😬😬." Here, Miquela's writers give her followers a peak into her private. Miquela takes her followers on a rather ordinary outing. There is no great excitement in this post. It is not exactly a private event, ostensibly anyone could catch a sighting (so to speak) of Miquela and her friend as they lounged in the park. However, the post still signals the meeting as a closed event between Miquela, her friend and 'you' the follower. Further, followers gain knowledge of Miquela's media habits (with her media consumption itself creating opportunities for relatability), insight on her current state of mind (a desire for self-improvement) and they get to 'meet' of one of Miquela's personal friends.

Figure 3: Private Viewing - Miquela and an unnamed friend read self-help books in a park. (Miquela, 2022a, February 9)

Miquela exhibits the transgressive intimate self as well in some of her Instagram posts. Her 16 March 2022 post (Fig. 4) is a simple closeup selfie of her crying. The caption references a previous post where Miquela shared excitement about getting a reading from a psychic. The reading, she says, has gone poorly, with Miquela confessing to her followers that since she is a robot she "can't be read." She

goes on to explain how this is a reminder of her inhuman nature, that she is "not one of the real girlies." It is a confession of feelings of inadequacy and of being other. She contradicts social norms which discourage crying in public and overshares with her followers about her personal struggles. Miquela's creators designed this affective moment with the intent of deepening the perception of intimacy between Miquela and her followers.

Figure 4: Robo Emotions - Miquela cries while expressing feelings of otherness.
(Miquela, 2022b, March 16)

These kinds of transgressive intimate displays have not always been successful for Miquela. In 2019 the digital model received backlash for a YouTube video posted to her channel that described her experience with sexual assault. Viewers criticized the video for "co-opting very real stories" for the sake of increasing her relatability to followers (Song, 2019). These criticisms show that while the rendering of traumatic experiences in fictional media can be deeply affecting—even when audiences do not identify directly with that experience (Bennett, 2005)—there is something about Miquela's specific fiction that alienates followers when her creators use her to tell stories of trauma. This appears to be an extension of the uncanny valley, where Miquela is positioned as both neither real nor fictious enough to engage with certain narratives. Regardless, avatars have a long history as

representatives of human users, and over time have become affective symbols in their own right.

Intimate Avatars

In Ken Hillis' 2015 essay "The Avatar and Online Affect" Hillis described some of the key phenomena that make avatars affective for the people who interact with them. Hillis is largely concerned with user-controlled avatars in highly social multiplayer online videogames like *World of Warcraft* (p. 75). In these spaces, Hillis argues players experience telepresence: "the phenomenological experience of presence at a distance" (p. 78). Players experience the game as allegory, putting themselves in the place of the avatar and experiencing the game world through the avatar's perspective (p. 77). As players embrace the ascribed role of their own avatar, they likewise recognize the parallel experience of other players. Players, through the perspective of their avatars, come to see other players' avatars as both representation of that player, and as sign of human activity (p. 79). The avatar transcends the status of a mere sign by simultaneously revealing the necessarily human actions required for the avatar's *liveliness* and virtual avatars benefit from these learned associations.

Avatars have a long history of use online outside of video games as well, with users representing their selves online with everything from photos of their actual face on dating sites, to customized notification sounds on messaging platforms (Nowak & Fox, 2018). In this way, using myriad and often non-representational forms of user identification is a long-accepted practice online. In recent years several big-name tech and social media companies have released tools to allow users to easily create animated 3D avatars as well. Snapchat began allowing users to represent their selves with 3D avatars in 2016—the same year Miquela's Instagram account debuted (Oppenheim, 2016)—when they integrated the avatar creation platform Bitmoji into their own services (Dingman, 2016). Apple introduced the similar Animoji (for creating anthropomorphized animal avatars) and Memoji (for creating human-like avatars) features to their iMessage platform in 2017 and 2018 respectively (Whitney, 2017; Potuck, 2018). Apple's avatar platforms came with the added feature of mapability, where users could map their avatars over their own facial expressions and movements in still images and videos. Meta brought user avatars to Facebook and Instagram in 2022 based on the avatars creation tools that already existed in Meta' virtual reality platform (Fingas, 2022). Each of these platforms expresses an increasing level of expected buy-in from users, who the developers believe want to represent their selves online with stylized and cartoony 3D versions of their own or idealized image. Since their introduction, users have: used Bitmoji when flirting with romantic interests (Arikewuyo et al., 2020); linked the use of Animoji in messages to

elevated relationship intimacy (Herring et al., 2020); and dressed their Meta avatars in designer clothing to show their personal tastes and lifestyle aspirations (Özkök ŞiŞman & BiLgiCi, 2023). These avatar creation platforms encourage social media users to use and see 3D avatars as personal identifiers and normalize the presence of these kinds of characters in a social media context. As these avatar creation platforms have developed in parallel to virtual influencers they reinforced Miquela's affective abilities by association.
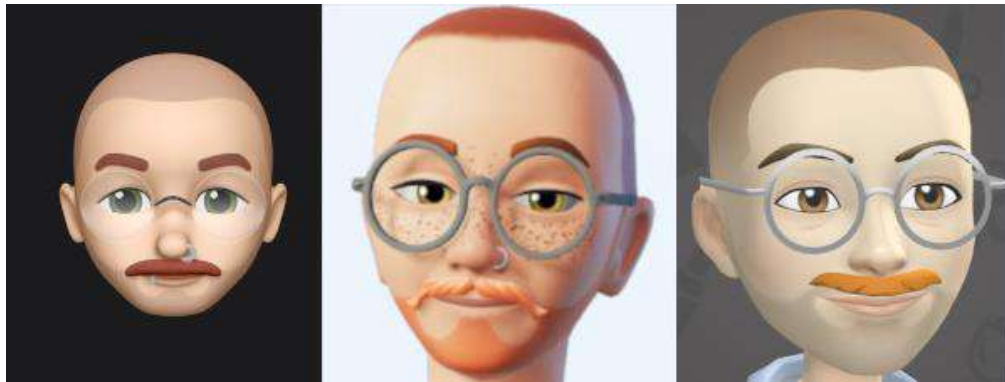

Figure 5: User Avatars - From left to right, the author's Memoji, Meta, and Bitmoji avatars.

Another way virtual influencer creators make their characters more relatable is by allowing them to move. Movement—as Hillis tells us in his extension of Gilles Deleuze's theory of the movement-image—is a key indicator of life. Part of how we distinguish signs from their real-world referents is by their lack of movement. Thus, by placing images in motion, media like cinema meld "experiential reality" with "physical reality," allowing viewers to read moving images as "identical" to the material world (2015, p. 80–81). Extending these ideas to videogame avatars, Hillis argues their ability to move allows avatars to further breakdown the barriers between sign and referent.

Virtual influencers extend this ability movement beyond simply appearing in video content on their Instagram profiles. Virtual influencers can also move between social media platforms. As virtual influencers begin to occupy space on more online places, the more tangible they become. Their ability to 'move' (that is, to have multiple accounts managed by their creators) from Instagram to TikTok to Twitter, appear in Discord servers, and comment in subreddits reflects the many and divergent ways human users move across and interact with varied online spaces. Just like many of their followers, virtual influencers are not localized to a singular online space, sharing slightly different aspects of their personalities in different places while playing with the cultural expectations of the given platform.

Perhaps the biggest inconsistency between user avatars and virtual influencers in the lack of a single human behind the avatar. Characters like Lil Miquela are corporately controlled entities, scripted and managed by teams of writers, animators, and marketers. Brud had a team of 32 people when it was sold in 2021 (Hayward, 2021), and the most recent archived version of their site (the brud.fyi URL which previously hosted the Brud website now redirects to dapperlabs.com, the site of the company that purchased them) lists five individuals working specifically on Miquela related content creation (Brud, 2023). There is no lone author behind the scenes to accredit the avatar to. Miquela does not point to an individual user, as much as she gestures toward the capitalistic interests of her creators. Other high polish virtual influencers are likely put together by similarly sized teams.

The existence of virtual influencers that are made by single creators, such as Wendy Lawn's (2021) Evie, only reify virtual influencer's association with individual users. Other related phenomenon like VTubers—YouTube personalities who use motion capture technologies to map digital avatars over their physical person while performing in-character for their videos—are often the creation of, or at the very least performed by, single individuals and are similar enough to virtual influencers that some users may see them as essentially the same. Users familiar with VTubers may assume Miquela works the same way.

Of course, no media text is all things for all people. While some social media users will not be drawn to Miquela or other virtual influencers, many others are and will be. Much of her ability to draw attention comes down to her creators' effective use of genres that both play into, expand on, and subvert user expectations of what influencer content should be by reframing it as explicitly fictional (but still relatable) as opposed to supposedly authentic. Recognizing that influencer content can be genre-fied and fictionalized gives researchers and social media users an opening to re-evaluate what authenticity means on social media, and how we might understand what we see there differently. An optimistic view of the situation might be that seeing the genre patterns behind virtual influencers allows social media users to recognize the same genre conventions in human influencer content, exposing the fictions therein and giving users a more critical eye towards what they see in their feeds. Pessimistically, the distillation and employment of influencer genres may make influencer content even more ubiquitous in our digital lives, making it cheaper and easier to make than ever before. Or, virtual influencers may encourage a shift towards understanding social media content as primarily entertainment media, designed and marketed as explicitly fictional material feeding audience desires.

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Making Meaning with Monopoly: The Use of Games as Pedagogical Tools to Promote Critical Media Literacy Skills in K-12 Classrooms

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Abstract:
Games can be considered media through which individuals communicate with one another, thus promoting a perceived sense of community. This paper advances the pedagogical potential of board games to teach players essential skills (Waren, 2011). It also proposes that remixing the traditional game of Monopoly to highlight various social inequalities may serve as a useful tool to teach K-12 students how to be critically media literate while engaging with the principles of intersectionality to better understand the world around them. This paper's argument originates from a threefold theoretical approach. First, Ahmed's (2006) work on orientation and disorientation proposes that board games are an effective means of educating students on critical media literacy and intersectionality, as they facilitate a deep sense of disorientation, morphing into orientation, which may both be considered foundational elements in how meaning is created. Second, Peters (2015) illustrates the roles media take on and how they are situated in our society (p. 14). Lastly, Collins (2000) highlights the necessity for alternate forms of knowledge, which seek to dismantle dominant ideologies (p. 256). The theories of these three scholars are especially pertinent to the objectives of critical media literacy, as they aptly synthesize the benefits of responsibly using media, challenging dominant knowledge and knowledge-creation practices, and finding silver linings in unfamiliar situations for the continual development of individuals and society (Peters, 2015; Collins, 2000; Ahmed, 2006). Essentially, critical media literacy parallels the principles of intersectionality, as it invites students to use empathy to reflect on the various factors that work together to shape people's lives (Kellner & Share, 2019; Collins & Bilge, 2016). Overall, this paper explores how Monopoly may be viewed as a medium, as it fosters communal interactions between players, which, as Ahmed (2006) implies, is necessary for the process of orientation.

Keywords:
Critical media literacy; board games; student learning; academic development; personal development

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Over the years, board games have amassed the reputation of being leisurely tools that individuals, jointly with family, friends and strangers, play in their free time. However, one key element of such games is that many can teach players essential life skills. Throughout this paper, I advance that remixing the traditional game of Monopoly to highlight various social inequalities may serve as a useful pedagogical tool to teach K-12 students how to be critically media literate while engaging with the principles of intersectionality to better understand the world around them. While there exists considerable literature around gamification and simulated versions of Monopoly as a pedagogical tool (Waren, 2011; Paino & Chin, 2011; Fisher, 2008; Jessup, 2001; Griffin & Jackson, 2011), I employ Kellner and Share's (2019) conceptualization of critical media literacy to exemplify how it may be taught through remixed versions of Monopoly and concretized in the K-12 curriculum.

I draw upon Ahmed's (2006) work around orientation and disorientation as board games facilitate a deep sense of disorientation, morphing into orientation, which may both be considered foundational elements in how meaning is created. In the process of becoming disoriented, students are prompted to reconsider their beliefs. However, once reorienting themselves, the opportunity for new beliefs arises. In addition, Peters' (2015) chapter, "Understanding Media," is useful in illustrating the roles media take on and how they are situated in our society (p. 14). Lastly, Collins' (2000) chapter "Black Feminist Epistemology" highlights the necessity for alternate forms of knowledge, which seek to dismantle dominant ideologies that can be particularly harmful to diverse social groups (p. 256). Ahmed's (2006) theory relates to Collins' (2000) work on knowledge legitimization, as the oscillation between disorientation and orientation shapes individuals' lived experiences and their understandings of the world around them. In essence, the theories of these three scholars are particularly pertinent to the objectives of critical media literacy, as they aptly weave the benefits of responsibly using media, challenging dominant knowledge and knowledge-creation practices, and finding silver linings in unfamiliar situations, for the continual development of individuals and society (Peters, 2015; Collins, 2000; Ahmed, 2006).

Through the viewpoints of Kellner and Share (2019), critical media literacy is "a theoretical framework and practical pedagogy in order to enhance individual sovereignty vis-à-vis media culture, empowering people to critically read, write, and create a better world" (p. xi). In other words, Kellner and Share (2019) explain that critical media literacy helps students establish essential skills that will assist them in their academic and personal lives, including how to sensibly navigate the online world and positively contribute to the public sphere (p. 6). Correspondingly, Saunders et al. (2016) express the importance of critical media literacy, stating that

"A prominent responsibility of literacy educators is to help students participate in productive critiquing, both as readers and writers, while engaging with their world" (p. 517). Thus, critical media literacy education transcends the practice of rationally interpreting media texts, further serving to teach students the importance of practical skills, such as empathy (Kellner & Share, 2019; Saunders et al., 2016).

The secondary principle that will be analyzed in relation to Ahmed's (2006) work around disorientation and orientation, Peters' (2015) articulation of media and Collins' (2000) examination of knowledge creation processes is intersectional theory, as it helps articulate the diverse lived experiences faced by individuals (Collins & Bilge, 2016), especially in mediated landscapes. According to Collins and Bilge (2016), intersectionality encourages individuals to consider the myriad of converging elements that shape one's life to better understand that no two individuals will have the same lived experiences (p. 11). In essence, the practice of being critically media literate is salient in employing the principles of intersectionality, as it invites students to display empathy, concentrating on the various identifying factors that work together to shape people's lives (Kellner & Share, 2019; Collins & Bilge, 2016). Here, the concept of orientation is relevant, as Ahmed (2006) states that "Orientations are about how we begin; how we proceed from "here," which affects how what is "there" appears, how it presents itself" (p. 8). It is in this sense that Monopoly may be viewed as an appropriate medium, as it fosters communal interactions between players, which, as Ahmed (2006) implies, is necessary for the process of becoming orientated. There exists a distinct link between empathy and orientation, as learning to put oneself in another's shoes might, albeit on a small scale, facilitate a greater sense of awareness of the lived experience of others.

This sense of community enabled by board games, which supports their classification as media, is thoroughly chronicled by Peters (2015). The author states that "Once communication is understood not only as sending messages—certainly an essential function—but also as providing conditions for existence, media cease to be only studios and stations, messages and channels, and become infrastructures and forms of life" (Peters, 2015, p. 14). This highlights how board games may be viewed as media, as they have the potential to allow diverse individuals to connect in a multitude of ways. This, in turn, can shape their everyday experiences, influencing their sense of belonging and how they situate themselves in the world. To further encapsulate the benefits of gamification, Paino and Chin (2011) express that "Simulations and games are a proven pedagogical tool that attempt to address some of the limitations of customary teaching methods" (p. 572). Further, Peters (2015), touching on Marshall McLuhan's explanation of the ubiquitous nature of media, states that "At some level, expression and existence merge" (p. 15). This idea might be

related to board games, as they enable a certain level of creative expression to ensue amongst players, as they engage in different activities. Thus, partaking in activities that encourage individuals to communicate their feelings and interact with others, while crafting their identities, can positively impact one's way of life. Demonstrated here is the immense potential of media, as it permeates many realms of human life, seeking to not only enable communication between individuals but help them develop their identities in online and offline spaces (Peters, 2015, p. 15).

The term remixing has been explained as a way to transform an existing medium or artifact into one that serves an alternate purpose (Navas, 2018, p. 253). As Navas (2018) specifically writes, "when a remix is produced, it is a thing that can be named, commodified and repurposed – only to begin that cycle afresh: such a thing is then taken and repurposed to become something different" (p. 253). Accordingly, the remixing of traditional Monopoly to highlight different social inequalities may be, as Waren (2011) articulates, "used to challenge our assumptions about how the world works" (p. 29). Considering traditional Monopoly, which was initially termed "The Landlord's Game," and created by Elizabeth Magie, the purpose was "to demonstrate how rents enrich property owners and impoverish tenants" (Hackett & Coghlan, 2023, para. 7). Thus, Monopoly was created by Magie to emphasize societal inequality resulting from capitalism (Hackett & Coghlan, 2023, para. 7). Returning to Waren's work, the author's statement around using games to unlearn dominant ideologies and frameworks (2011, p. 29), can be paralleled with Ahmed's (2006) examination of disorientation. More specifically, Ahmed (2006) states that "disorientation is a way of describing the feelings that gather when we lose our sense of who it is that we are" (p. 20). Therefore, as Ahmed (2006, p. 7) suggests, students might begin to embrace the process of unlearning, or rather, master the practice of making the familiar strange, and the strange familiar as they deconstruct dominant ideologies and move towards embracing alternate forms of knowledge, as Collins (2000) introduces. In view of Monopoly being created to emphasize the ills of capitalism (Hackett & Coghlan, 2023, para. 7), the process of remixing the game to highlight other themes can encourage players to learn more about and gain knowledge on diverse subjects.

Teaching the principles of critical media literacy through remixed versions of Monopoly additionally serves as a direct method of challenging the dominant ideologies that shape our social, political, and educational landscapes and meaning-making practices (Waren, 2011, p. 28). To this point, Waren (2011) writes that "Sociologists have used games or simulations to spark the sociological imagination, to stimulate critical thinking, and to introduce social stratification" (p. 28). In a similar vein, Fisher (2008) explains that games are a useful way to help students grasp new knowledge and concepts, as they are generally simple to navigate (p. 272). Jessup

(2001) looks at social inequality through a simulated version of Monopoly titled "Sociopoly" and how it is employed in post-secondary contexts (p. 103). The author indicates that simulated games based on social inequality intend to provide students with a deeper understanding of how the world works (Jessup, 2001, p. 103). This is specifically done in "Sociopoly" through the practice of rewriting rules, where Jessup (2001) writes that "At the conclusion of Sociopoly, all teams must rewrite and negotiate the rules of the game to make it more fair and equitable" (p. 105). Griffin and Jackson (2011) support these notions, articulating that "many students today are unaware of how systemic privilege and oppression affect their lives and the lives of others" (p. 1). Overall, these examples accentuate the value of further integrating critical media literacy education into K-12 classrooms and the advantages of remixed board games to teach such principles to students.

To provide another example, Ansoms and Geenen (2012) explore "Development Monopoly," which brings attention to societal inequality, and poverty, in particular (p. 713). For this specific simulated version of Monopoly, Ansoms and Geenen (2012) state that "The purpose is to extract participants temporarily from their familiar contexts and to introduce them to an abstract game environment from where they can reflect upon societal dynamics in the real world" (p. 714). The practice of making the familiar strange and the strange familiar by taking players out of their comfort zones allows for a meaningful creative activity, which can enable individual growth amongst players (Ansoms & Geenen, 2012; Ahmed, 2006, p. 7). This connects to Ahmed's (2006) work, as the strange and familiar coexist: "being lost is a way of inhabiting space by registering what is not familiar: being lost can in its turn become a familiar feeling" (p. 7). Therefore, as Ahmed (2006) articulates, there is power in welcoming strange environments, as such practice opens the door to new perspectives, helping individuals gain wisdom and skills that may lead to growth in several areas of their lives. This illustrates how the remixing of Monopoly games to foreground an array of themes perhaps previously unknown to players, as set forth in the previous literature conducted by Jessup (2001) and Ansoms and Geenen (2012), can serve as distinctive forms of pedagogy to educate students about how the world works (Waren, 2011; Kellner & Share, 2019).

Returning to Kellner and Share's (2019) conceptualization of critical media literacy, the authors state that "Developing critical media literacy pedagogy also involves perceiving how any type of media can be used positively to teach a wide range of topics, such as multicultural understandings of ethnic and racial diversity, [and] problems of discrimination and oppression" (p. 6). This feature of critical media literacy education can positively impact the development of younger generations, as it encourages students to critically think about and employ alternative knowledge, as

opposed to more traditional forms of knowledge and educational frameworks (Collins, 2000). This point is exemplified in Collins' (2000) chapter "Black Feminist Epistemology," around how knowledge is produced, upheld, and established from dominant ideologies (pp. 251-53).

More specifically, through Collins' (2000) discussion of marginalized groups, "subordinate groups have long had to use alternative ways to create independent self-definitions and self-valuations and to rearticulate them through our own specialists" (p. 252). Based on this explanation by Collins (2000), presiding knowledge usually does not consider the lived experiences of subordinated groups, which, in turn, results in the invalidation of their encounters (p. 253). Accordingly, remixed versions of Monopoly can teach students how to better understand and empathize with the lived experiences of others (Kellner & Share, 2019; Waren, 2011). When individuals are introduced to alternate perspectives that differ from those that they rely on to form opinions and viewpoints, they can diversify their modes of thinking, as they embrace unfamiliarity and process new knowledge in ways that make sense to them. Waren (2011) affirms this idea, stating that "Pedagogical games can challenge individualistic assumptions and demonstrate the lasting effects of discrimination in a direct, but non-threatening way" (p. 34). Hence, the knowledge practices of subordinate groups, as Collins (2000) discusses, can be integrated into remixed versions of Monopoly, as those identifying with such groups can engage in the game-creation process, which might serve as a source of empowerment.

The principles of critical media literacy emphasized through remixed board games encourage broader understandings of "the differences, challenges and forms of oppression organized around class, race, gender, and sexuality" (Kellner & Share, 2019, p. 6). These aspects are also highlighted through Collins' (2000) scholarship on knowledge production, as students might be motivated to move away from an educational system akin to what Freire (2000) terms the banking concept of education, which encourages passive learning, and begin to critically challenge what they are learning, instead of passively absorbing such information (Kellner & Share, 2019, p. 14). Accordingly, by integrating remixed versions of Monopoly into classroom settings, students are given the opportunity to apply the knowledge they have learned from diverse areas, specifically in relation to the lived experiences of others.

One question that emerges concerning the importance of critical media literacy, intersectionality, and an effective means by which these two concepts can be taught is, "Why is it important to learn about the lived experiences of others?" On an elementary level, as Kellner and Share (2019, p. 6) and Collins (2000) imply, it is

valuable for individuals to diversify their knowledge, as this may spark motivation around methods of improving society and creating environments that embrace different beliefs. As Collins (2000, p. 259) notes, learning about the lived experiences of others presents areas for allyship and the development of empathy skills, which are, as specified by Kellner and Share (2019, p. 6), vital for the participatory democracy element of critical media literacy education.

Moreover, and further relevant to learning about the lived experiences of others is the concept of ideology. Kofman (1999) explains ideology as "the unconscious of a class, of the dominant class which, in order to maintain its domination indefinitely, has an interest in hiding from itself the historical character of its domination" (p. 17). Kofman's articulation illustrates how dominant ideologies come to be and manifest in our society in hidden ways (1999, p. 17). This is useful for a broad comprehension of our current education system, where such ideologies take form, shaping the knowledge that students are required to learn (Kellner & Share, 2019, p. 13). As a result of this, other forms of knowledge that illustrate the lived experiences of others are often excluded altogether (Collins, 2000, p. 268).

To address this issue of knowledge inequity, the classification of board games and remixed versions of Monopoly as media, to teach the principles of critical media literacy and subsequently, intersectionality, is useful in helping students begin to comprehend, albeit, on a small scale, the lived experiences of others (Waren, 2011, p. 29). Further substantiating this, Waren (2011) states that "In teaching and learning, the goal of simulation is the "experience" itself" (p. 29). This can further be connected to Ahmed's (2006) theory on orientation, by which a person experiences feelings of orientation when they are familiar with things, specifically regarding the tangible space that one assumes (p. 6). While the idea of being orientated may exude feelings of sameness and familiarity, individuals must experience disorientation at various points in their lives to flourish (Ahmed, 2006, pp. 1, 20). In other words, the constant flux between spaces of orientation and disorientation encapsulates the very cyclical nature of life (Ahmed, 2006, p. 16). The circular pattern which life takes is useful in considering how games may serve as an effective means of teaching critical media literacy education, as it acknowledges the lived experiences of others and why those experiences should also be deemed dominant forms of knowledge (Kellner & Share, 2019; Collins, 2000). This parallels the construction of Monopoly, by which players travel around the board in a circular motion, learning firsthand about how inequality manifests, which can still be a powerful learning lesson despite the games-based context.

Drawing on Waren's (2011) work on simulated Monopoly once more, games as educational instruments "may help a student to understand some of the previously inexplicable attitudes and behaviors of actors on either side of a power relationship" (pp. 28-29). As Ahmed (2006) explicitly argues, moving away from one's comfort zones can initially result in a sense of disorientation (p. 20). Nonetheless, disorientation can positively influence an individual's growth as they engage in self-reflection practices, thus gaining wisdom (Ahmed, 2006, p. 20). Being receptive to alternate teaching methods allows students to view the world and theories through different lenses. As Ahmed (2006) eloquently states:

> And yet, we don't know what happens when we reach such a line and let ourselves live by holding on. If we are pulled out, we don't know where the force of the pull might take us. We don't know what it means to follow the gift of the unexpected line that gives us the chance for a new direction and even a chance to live again. (p. 18)

This accentuates the crux of critical media literacy education by advancing that there is power in the unknown, in terms of the alternate pathways our lives might take us with respect to varying educational and professional endeavours (Ahmed, 2006), and it is worthwhile to consult various forms of pedagogy that may be more efficient in teaching students practical skills around knowledge dissemination, empathy, and effective digital citizenship (Waren, 2011; Kellner & Share, 2019).

In conclusion, remixed versions of Monopoly have immense potential to educate K-12 students on the principles of critical media literacy and intersectionality. Peters' (2015) theory illustrates how remixed board games can be viewed as media, through which individuals communicate, as "Media are our infrastructures of being, the habitats and materials through which we act and are" (p. 15). Thus, employing board games as pedagogical tools provide opportunities for unique communication between students, where learning is mutually influenced (Waren, 2011). The communication facilitated by such games prompts students to actively reflect on how society is structured (Waren, 2011, p. 29). However, this process of reflection may lead students to unlearn material they once relied on and, in turn, experience feelings of disorientation (Ahmed, 2006, p. 20). Further, Collins' (2000) work on knowledge validation displays the requisite for consulting alternative forms of knowledge for an in-depth comprehension of how marginalized groups are situated in various realms, including, but not limited to academia (pp. 253-54). The call for these alternative forms of knowledge to be disseminated coexists with the intentions of critical media literacy education as its teachings function to guide students on how to deconstruct previously-learned knowledge to gain a deeper understanding of the world (Kellner & Share, 2019, p. 14; Collins, 2000). Nonetheless,

as Ahmed (2006) communicates, the process of becoming orientated requires following unique paths and learning along the way (p. 16), which is enabled by gamification.

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The Right to Disconnect for Public Relations practitioners: possibility or pipe dream?

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Abstract:
The proliferation of information and communication technologies (ICTs) such as smartphones and laptops for work purposes has given rise to discussion about the use of these technologies to conduct work outside of working hours. While technology confers advantages, some scholars say ICTs make everything seem urgent and tether workers to the office. Several countries have established a Right to Disconnect from ICTs although in Canada, only Ontario has done so to date. This research investigates the experience of technostress of public relations (PR) practitioners; how they resist or emancipate themselves from work technology; and, what this means for PR practitioners and public relations. The Right to Disconnect for public relations practitioners in Canada was examined from the point of view of PR practitioners themselves, who build relationships between organizations and their publics in a 24/7 world. PR Practitioners respond to issues and such crises that are not limited by working hours. Mixed methods research was completed via a survey and semi-structured interviews. Practitioners believe an organization's views on the Right to Disconnect in PR would depend on several factors – such as the type of organization and whether employees are unionized. They also feel organizations expect and should have some support outside regular hours from their PR team, especially to respond to crises and other urgencies. They suggest the ability to disconnect resides largely in the realm of managerial decisions (such as additional resources and staffing) rather than within the control of practitioners. Some PR practitioners are able to free themselves from work technology after hours through various strategies, for example, turning off notifications. This research adds to existing research on the Right to Disconnect and provides context on the lived experience of PR practitioners.

Keywords:
public relations; Right to Disconnect; hypermodernity; work-life balance; ICTs

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Technology enables workers to do work anywhere, anytime. No longer is the work day confined to the office exclusively. While this can confer great advantages and flexibility, others have also labelled technology an electronic leash (Carayol et al., 2017). The two-sided nature of technology became even more apparent during the pandemic, where the ability to set boundaries between work and home became more difficult as home overwhelmingly became the place where the work day took place.

Scholars have observed that we live in an era of hypermodernity (Lipovetsky, 2005; Aubert, 2008). According to Aubert (2009), the hypermodern society results from a compression of time and space in which everything is hyper – hyperconnected and in hyperdrive. This underlines how people in society have changed their relationship to time and worship urgency, to the point where employees and employers at times consider everything urgent and important, whether it is or not (Aubert, 2003; Aubert 2009, p.77). Characteristics of this society include social acceleration (Rosa, 2003) in which everything in society is sped up. Rosa identifies technological acceleration, an acceleration of society itself and acceleration of the pace of life as elements of a socially accelerated society – all elements relevant to the study of public relations in a hypermodern society. The relationship of ICTs to urgency has also been noted by scholars such as Bonneville & Grosjean (2006, para. 15) who suggest ICTs help implant an ideology of urgency in organizations. This type of urgency creates what de Gauléjac (2014) calls "hyperactivity" to keep up. It also cuts both ways, in that people are proud of the work that they do but also report feeling exhausted (de Gauléjac, 2014, p. 229). According to Jauréguiberry and Proulx (2011), the use of ICTs sits at the intersection of the tension in a hypermodern society between the drive to make sense of one's position in the world while continuing to be an autonomous individual to the extent possible. Some have also noted that the state of urgency that ICTs enable then leads to a variety of psychosocial outcomes for workers such as stress burnout, and mental illnesses (Valléry & Leduc, 2012; de Gauléjac, 2014). Brod (1984) identified technostress as "a modern disease of adaptation caused by inability to cope with new computer technologies in a healthy manner." While the flexibility that technology affords can be advantageous, it can also be challenging for workers if they are required to or feel they must be responsive at all times.

This research focused on the experience of technostress of public relations practitioners in particular: Q1. the lived experience of technostress of public relations practitioners Q2. How practitioners resist, emancipate or micro-emancipate themselves (Alvesson & Wilmott, 1992; Mumby, 2005) from technology demands; Q3. what this means for both practitioners and the practice of public relations.

ICTs and the right to disconnect – a literature review

The Right to Disconnect is one tool that allows workers to disconnect from technology and potentially mitigate various stresses. France and Spain are considered pioneers in such laws and practices (Lerouge & Trujillo Pons, 2022). Other countries around the world, primarily in Europe but also elsewhere, have implemented laws or regulations enshrining the Right to Disconnect. These include, among others, Italy and Ireland, while most recently laws have come into effect in Belgium, Luxembourg and Portugal (Kelly, 2022). According to a Government of Canada report of consultations on the Right to Disconnect, unions and Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Canada advocate for a legislated solution to the Right to Disconnect, while employers believe the current Canada Labour Law and regulations are sufficient (Government of Canada, 2022). To date in Canada, only Ontario has legislated the Right to Disconnect for workers, which it defined as "not engaging in work-related communications, including emails, telephone calls, video calls or the sending or reviewing of other messages, so as to be free from the performance of work" (Government of Ontario, 2021). It requires that companies with more than 25 workers have a Right to Disconnect policy.

With respect to the Right to Disconnect for public relations practitioners, a search of the literature did not find any studies specifically focused on this topic in public relations. However, a broader search on related themes found interesting contributions on technostress and ICT use in public relations. For example, Bucher et al. (2013) focus on the cognitive and literacy aspects of technostress (p. 1651). The view of the authors is that being literate in social media "means being able to cope with overload, invasion and uncertainty" (p. 1652). An exploratory qualitative study – conducted in Hong Kong and Austria with professionals in advertising, public relations and journalism – focused on ICT stressors and positive features of ICTs (Ninaus et al., 2015). It found that "constant availability, connectivity pressure, an inner obligation for availability and an increased workload emerged as major stressors of work-related ICT use" (p. 7).

Several studies address stress in public relations by examining ICT use. These studies take a work-life balance lens (Aldoory et al., 2008; Jin et al., 2014; Shen et al., 2015) where work-life balance is defined as "efforts by male and female employed persons who juggle various, personal, home and work responsibilities" (Aldoory et al., 2008, p. 2). These studies focus on such issues as how practitioners cope when faced with stressors and the role of gender in work-life conflict. They look at both positive aspects of ICTs such as increased income and flexibility and negative impacts such as long work hours on practitioners (Shen & Fussell Sisco, 2015).

The idea of pressure, or speed, in public relations, and the subject of constant connectivity in relation to time-based work conflict has been tackled by some studies (Aldoory et al., 2008; Gilkerson et al., 2018). Use of ICTs in PR has been found to be a predictor of time-based work-life conflict, in that the responsibilities of work may intrude upon time that would normally be allotted to another life role.

This study fills a gap in research as it examines how public relations practitioners in Canada view the Right to Disconnect and adds to the growing literature of how workers may compose with and/or free themselves from a constant link to technology. The findings may inform discussions on the Right to Disconnect for this occupation and indeed, other occupations that respond to work communications and continue to work after regular working hours. It also contributes to the conversation on strategies that may be used to restore work-life balance.

Method

To respond to the research questions and allow participants the opportunity to provide feedback from their lived experience, mixed methods research on the use of ICTs by public relations practitioners was completed. Mixed-methods is a popular research approach in the social, behavioral, and health sciences, in which researchers collect, analyze, and integrate both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study or in a long-term program of inquiry to address their research questions (Creswell, 2018). For this research, I chose to conduct quantitative research first, followed by qualitative research that began once survey responses had been gathered. I conducted the quantitative research first because this allowed me to gain a statistical picture and a sense of how practitioners responded. With the quantitative results as a base, I could also then probe more deeply with a smaller sub-group of survey respondents in the interviews. This mixed methods approach is known as explanatory sequential mixed methods (Creswell, 2018). As noted, the research used validated scales for the quantitative portion of this study, supplemented by open and close-ended questions that would allow practitioners to express themselves in several areas with a focus on their voices in answering the questions. For the qualitative portion of the research, the focus was on delving deeper into the areas of interest that were raised by the data from the quantitative work.

The quantitative method chosen was survey research, conducted with a national, bilingual sample of practitioners who were invited to respond to a questionnaire. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a sub-set of respondents after the survey period closed. The survey collected responses from May

9, 2022 to December 22, 2022 (n=147) and interviews were conducted from February 1 – March 17, 2023 (n=25). This paper specifically examines responses to two original survey questions on the Right to Disconnect. It also summarizes feedback received in the interviews surrounding the Right to Disconnect.

Recruitment for the survey was done via professional organizations such as the Canadian Public Relations Society, social media sites and personal networks. Recruitment criteria included that respondents must be working 30 or more hours per week in public relations; that they have three or more years of experience in PR; and that they respond to work demands after working hours (such as evenings, weekends and holidays). The two open-ended questions on The Right to Disconnect were framed in such a way to better understand first, how public relations practitioners felt organizations would support a right to disconnect for PR practitioners, and secondly whether practitioners felt they should be able to disconnect.

The choice was made for these questions to be open-ended to better focus on the lived experience of practitioners and their thoughts on these issues. Responses to the questions were reviewed several times and analyzed via thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Responses to each question were grouped by theme, in this case manually by use of coloured post-it notes, and then further analyzed and coded.

Questions were intended to document the experiences public relations practitioners have with their technology for work purposes (Q1) as well as look at ways in which practitioners may emancipate themselves from their technological devices (Q2), while eliciting information about what this might mean for practitioners and the practice (Q3). They also provided an opportunity to see how practitioners viewed this question in the context of discussions about the Right to Disconnect that have emerged around the globe. A narrative format for two questions on the Right to Disconnect was chosen because it would help better understand and identify nuances.

The two narrative questions were:

Q1. Do you believe that organizations would be supportive of public relations practitioners who wish to exercise a right to disconnect?

Q2. Regardless of how organizations view this question, what are your thoughts on whether public relations practitioners and managers should be able to disconnect from demands of the workplace (for example, by not responding to work

requests via smartphones or computers or not checking social media after certain hours of the day) and whether this is possible in PR?

In addition, this paper also covers some of the responses received in interviews on what strategies public relations practitioners used to disconnect from their technology when used for work purposes.

Findings

Results for question 1 on whether organizations would be supportive of practitioners wishing to exercise a right to disconnect showed that a few isolated respondents felt their organization would support such a right. However, most responses fell in the theme of "it depends," highlighting the nuanced nature of how respondents felt organizations would respond.

The use of the words "it depends" by respondents was so common that it became the largest category of responses. By delving deeper into these responses it was found that some practitioners felt it might depend on whether an employee was unionized or non-unionized; management or non-management; in a smaller organization or larger one; in a role such as crisis communications or media relations; and finally, whether someone was available on call to respond.

> It depends – sometimes we're needed after hours. We can't ignore a crisis because the traditional workday is done. I think my workplace is generally supportive of disconnecting when the day is done if there are not pressing items. I would answer this survey a lot different if I was at my previous employer in healthcare communications. There was an overbearing intrusion into personal life that lead [*sic*] to my finding another job. (Senior executive, public sector)

There were also practitioners who felt the right may be partially supported subject to certain caveats – the most often cited being the expectation that practitioners would be available to respond to crises or emergencies. Practitioners felt there would be little flexibility to disconnect in such instances.

> Limited. Public relations practitioners, particularly issues managers have little control over what happens in a day and if we have an issue blow up at night, I doubt we will be able to say we are exercising our right to disconnect. (Executive, public sector)

Some practitioners also seemed to suggest that it was neither possible nor advisable for public relations practitioners to disconnect from their technology after

hours. A senior executive with a not-for-profit/NGO put it this way: "This sounds dangerous as we want to be part of the decision making which is not always done during working hours."

Where practitioners did see some opportunities to change the current situation, the solutions they noted tended to be in management control – and not actions practitioners perceived they could take themselves.

> It is good practice for any company to have a back-up plan for the PR functions. There should be a plan in place to allow PR practitioners to have down time. Even for those of us self-employed, I have a colleague that I cover for when she's away and vice versa. (Senior consultant)

> Our organization has a "weekdays before 6pm" policy, which encourages disconnecting after 6 pm and on weekends. However, often things do come up that need to be dealt with. My supervisor is excellent at saying, "this can wait until Monday" in most cases. (Coordinator, public sector)

Responses seemed to describe a certain perception of the work of PR practitioners and possibly a culture within PR itself of constant availability. It is difficult to tell how much of this comes from the expectations organizations place on PR practitioners vs. how much practitioners identify these requirements as part of their role and identity. One respondent, whose company has established a Right to Disconnect policy, noted: "I received the Right to Disconnect policy. It just means an apology comes with the after-hours/weekend asks. I'm still expected to be available on demand." (Director, private sector). Another commented on the fact organizational cultures may need to change for PR practitioners to be able to disconnect. "I think there will need to be a significant culture shift in many organizations for this to truly happen. People are use [sic] to having their communications professionals available at all times." (Manager, public sector)

The second question focused on practitioners' own views of whether there should be a Right to Disconnect in PR. There were a few practitioners who did not feel that a Right to Disconnect was possible at all in PR. Respondents suggested they made sense of this by linking it to effectiveness, trust and reputation. As one said: "I don't feel it is possible to disconnect and still be effective in public relations." (Manager, public sector). Another noted: "As so many of our issues and activities may come out of the blue, it would be challenging for an entire PR team to disconnect and remain relevant or valued if something were to come up." (Senior executive, not-for-profit/NGO)

There were also a few responses that suggested the ability to disconnect should be an absolute right for PR practitioners, but this did not reflect the majority. While most respondents feel the right to disconnect in PR is possible, it is seen as a right with caveats, particularly in relation to crisis situations and the sense is generally someone should always be available "on call." Practitioners say that in order to increase the possibilities for PR practitioners to disconnect, there is a need for organizations to better define what constitutes a crisis that would require after hours work, and that the boundaries between work and personal life should be made clearer. They also say organizations should resource the function adequately to ensure appropriate levels of staffing and compensate employees for extra work.

> I believe that PR practitioners should have the same rights as everyone
> to disconnect from the workplace. However I don't believe that will
> ever be the reality due to the perceived pressures of the function and
> the needs of leadership and clients. (Director, public sector)

As with the first survey question, respondents also suggested that the ability to disconnect may be dependent on industry or role or other factors, making it more difficult for people in certain situations to disconnect. There was also the suggestion that those who may not be willing to be on-call all the time would have difficulty. One noted that: "In the education industry, I believe this is possible. There have been only a handful of true emergencies where evening and weekend work is necessary. My organization respects my vacation time as well." (Coordinator, public sector) Others are not so sure: "I think for some positions this may be possible but not all. And clients or employers may just look for employees willing to continue to be 'on' all the time." (Manager, public sector)

Respondents suggested the practice as a whole could remain responsive in the case of emergencies and at other times, without all practitioners being required to be available at the same time, leaving room for disconnection of some practitioners, some of the time. However, as with the first question, solutions they identified seemed to be largely in the realm of how the work is organized within teams or organizations. By and large, responses did not seem to suggest practitioners felt they had power to resist constant connection, although this question was probed in other questions in both the survey and the interviews. The strategies most-often mentioned in relation to the Right to Disconnect were on-call schedules, more staff, overtime pay or time off in-lieu of overtime, and policies plans and protocols, including better defining what might constitute an emergency or crisis.

> Absolutely possible. There are very few things that are truly an
> "emergency". I work for a municipality and an emergency is defined as

"lives are in danger". If there is no immediate threat or harm, there is no need for after hours work. I think that the definition of a crisis / issue / emergency needs to be clearly established. If an employer wants or needs a 24/7 issues management function, they should staff that appropriately, and not expect a single practitioner to do it all. (Manager, public sector)

What was noticeable is that when one considered the idea of public relations practitioners having agency over their time or implementing strategies to allow them to not be connected all the time, the responses were few and far-between. Most responses focused on what organizations could/should do, and not what the practitioners can do for themselves. Only a couple of responses in the survey related to strategies practitioners could leverage that utilized technology.

I think it should be realistic that you can set an autoresponder on your emails that state everything will be dealt with during the business day and triaged in order of importance. If it's an emergency to call but no text or emails or private pm's. (Manager, private sector)

This is very hard in PR. I have worked hard to set boundaries with my mercurial boss to only contact me on personal time for emergencies. It's hit and miss. Sadly – I have to be passive aggressive which I hate and not answer his or other C-Suite calls/texts/emails during personal time. (Executive, public sector)

In the end, practitioners' responses to the survey on whether they can disconnect suggested that while many thought this is possible in PR, they also concluded it was logistically difficult. In order to do so, there were certain conditions they felt need to exist – such as more staff, having someone on-call and policies and plans to define expectations. As a result, practitioner views of their ability to disconnect did not differ much from whether they think organizations would support the right to disconnect for them. A few also linked the importance of being able to do so to wellness, mental health and other outcomes for the profession and for practitioners.

Public relations professional(s) absolutely must be able to disconnect. The work we do often has us on the hard end of disgruntled customers (disrespectful complaints or attacks through social media that, while usually directed at the organization, feel personal) and we need breaks from that to stay positive, get perspective and recharge. (Manager, public sector)

Other questions in the survey and interviews probed whether there are any strategies that practitioners do utilize, independent of whether their organization has

a policy or practices that support the Right to Disconnect. While analysis is ongoing, preliminary review of responses in the survey suggest that a small majority don't look at their messages on weekends (56%) and that similarly about half (52%) block out time or turn off their technology past a certain time to get a break from work (49%).

> My employer approved a right-to-disconnect policy, so I feel less guilty about setting my vacation responder and actually ignoring most emails during my vacation. I also respond to fewer emails at night. (Director, Not-for-profit/NGO)

Other strategies that were mentioned by participants in interviews were: taking a break from work technology; turning off notifications on weekends and time off; taking vacations in locations that are "out of range", such as remote locations or outside the country; delayed or no response to certain e-mails/messages; using technology to schedule outgoing messages or out-of-office and taking vacations from the technology (i.e. no work phone at hand). Further probing in the context of interviews was also able to elicit some of the feelings practitioners have about being tethered to technology.

> But I was like no, I am on vacation for three weeks. And I said that if you do reach out to me while I'm on vacation, we better see the fire from space. No reason a capable team and a general manager, there's no reason that I should not be able to go on vacation. (Manager, public sector)

Limitations and Conclusion

The survey was conducted with practitioners who self-selected to respond to the research, which may have introduced self-selection bias. The majority of respondents also self-identified as part of management or director ranks. Less experienced staff may have a different view or experience surrounding the Right to Disconnect. This research found that public relations practitioners generally feel that the Right to Disconnect would not be entirely supported by organizations, particularly as it relates to emergency/crisis response, issues management and media relations. PR practitioners' views did not differ substantially from what they felt their organization's view might be about the Right to Disconnect. In order to be able to disconnect, PR practitioners feel there are certain conditions that need to exist – such as more staff, a better definition of what constitutes a crisis, on-call staff and policies and plans to define expectations. Further, when asked to respond what could be done to support practitioners, solutions were identified to be largely in the management realm – such as adding more staff or resources – rather than in the control of the

practitioners themselves. Further probing both via survey and interviews, however, elicited a number of strategies some practitioners may use to resist the constant call of technology. Overall, many practitioners do not feel they have much latitude to disconnect – especially if they are managers or directors and/or are expected to respond to crises.

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Building BILLY: The Intersection of Cognitive Semiotics and Cultural Techniques in IKEA Furniture Assembly

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Abstract:
Because it is common for research topics to be approached from desperate frameworks, it is rare to find a topic that brings together differing frameworks well. However, this paper argues that in the case of building the BILLY-style IKEA bookcase via the instruction manual, two desperate frameworks – cognitive semiotics and cultural techniques – become connected, intertwined, and dependent on each other for the individual to build the bookcase properly. Because IKEA instructions rely heavily on images, symbols and numbers without the aid of words, cognitive semiotics is brought to the forefront for their interpretation and application to the physical product. At the same time, cultural techniques must be implemented to accomplish these tasks; most notably, how to read instruction manuals, how to implement tools, and the ability to apply prior technique knowledge to the task at hand. The arguments for this paper pull from the BILLY instruction manual itself, as well as scholarly works that touch on topics from both cognitive semiotics and cultural techniques. On the side of cognitive semiotics, topics such as multimedia learning, knowledge management, visual narrativity, information linking, and tools as mediating devices are used. On the cultural techniques side, topics addressed include; how the cultural techniques of grids and lists are used in the instruction manual, how cultural techniques enable work with things and symbols as skills that require cognition, how instructions are the ultimate example of cultural techniques, and how the 'techniques of the body', which are an integral part of cultural techniques, require social, psychological, and biological elements much like cognitive semiotics. By including these varying topics in the cultural techniques discipline it can be shown how cultural techniques are formed alongside cognitive and semiotic processes and that cultural techniques and cognitive semiotics cannot escape each other in many instances.

Keywords:
cultural techniques, cognitive semiotics, BILLY bookcase, instruction manual

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Schools of thought or frameworks from which topics are approached can differ greatly and are, arguably, expected to. As such, it is rare to find two areas of study that complement each other and, rarer still, ones that do this well. In this paper, I show how cognitive semiotics and cultural techniques are connected, intertwined, and, in the case of building the BILLY-style IKEA bookcase via the instruction manual, dependent on each other. The aim of this paper is to showcase that by using multiple frameworks we can see a larger, more complete picture of what is going on around us in our everyday activities which, in turn, can provide better and stronger support for those frameworks.

The BILLY bookcase is used to illustrate a common everyday instance where cognitive semiotics and cultural techniques come together due, in large part, to the fact that IKEA instructions rely heavily on images, symbols, and numbers without the aid of words. As such, cognitive semiotics is brought to the forefront for the instructions' interpretation and application to the physical product. At the same time, cultural techniques must be implemented to accomplish these tasks; including, how to read instruction manuals (the read-do-read-do rhythm), how to implement tools (such as screwdrivers), and the ability to apply prior technique knowledge to the task at hand (such as cultural technique knowledge that allows for the comprehension of the instructions and their application). Because cultural techniques are formed alongside cognitive and semiotic processes, it is difficult, if not impossible, for cultural techniques and cognitive semiotics to escape each other, particularly when following instructions in hopes of accomplishing the correct assembly of the BILLY bookcase. Still, as many furniture assemblers have discovered when they find their bookcase not going together quite the way it should, nothing is as simple as it seems. It is not as simple as saying that one needs both cognitive semiotics and cultural techniques to have any chance of properly building a BILLY bookcase, there are multiple levels and nuances to their integration that allow for the final product to be realized.

With the above in mind, this paper is divided into four sections. The first section provides a short explanation of the choice of the BILLY bookcase instruction manual for this paper, the second and third sections carry the main discussions for the paper and are labelled, per the rhythm for instructions, as variations of 'reading' and 'doing'. In the 'reading' section, the cultural techniques and cognitive semiotic processes that need to be applied to read and understand the BILLY instructions will be discussed. In the 'doing' section, cultural techniques and cognitive semiotic processes will once again be covered, but in relation to putting the bookcase together in accordance with the instruction manual. The fourth, and last section, provides a summary and concluding remarks.

The BILLY Bookcase

First, a little explanation as to the choice of instruction manuals. The BILLY bookcase instruction manual was chosen because of its prevalent use by the general public of multiple and varying cultures. The IKEA (2024) website declares that "every five seconds, one BILLY bookcase is sold somewhere in the world." This, along with the fact that the safety warning (the only written instructions in the manual) are provided in thirty-seven languages, shows how many different peoples and cultures encounter the BILLY bookcase instruction manual. This diversity also explains why the manual provides instructions through images, symbols and numbers only, as the cost of producing individualized instructions in words would be high. However, this may also cause confusion between the interpretation of the images and symbols, even when assuming that Arabic numerals are understood everywhere equally. As such, cognitive semiotics and cultural techniques will play important roles in their deciphering.

Now, let us move on and look at how cognitive semiotics and cultural techniques accomplish this. Following the instructions that many manuals tell us time and time again, we will start with reading.

Reading: Understanding the BILLY Instruction Manual

When it comes to reading the instructions for the BILLY bookcase, it is not wrong to think that most of the action occurs in the mind through cognition. However, there is also something to be said of the actions that occur and meanings that are portrayed outside of the mind, that have been put in place by the surrounding culture, sometimes over centuries or millennia, that help that cognition occur more readily. That is to say, with the aid of cultural techniques and semiotics, reading, and more so, understanding the instructions is made possible. For without them, as we will soon see, building a BILLY bookshelf would be rather impossible.

To support this point, the relationships between elementary cultural techniques and cognitive semiotics needed to read and understand in general are addressed first, then characteristics more specific to instructions.

Elementary Techniques and Cognitive Semiotics

Let us begin with cognitive semiotics. Cognitive semiotics investigates phenomena by pulling equally from semiotics, linguistics, and cognitive science

(Zlatev, 2015, p. 1043) – all areas involved in reading and implementing instructions. As writing is an external representation of language (Zlatev, 2015, p. 1049), linguistics are involved majorly in the warning section of the instructions printed in thirty-seven languages. Semiotics come into play through the images provided as the main form of direction, and cognitive science can be seen not only in the need to be able to process the words and images but also in the way that both of these use perception to acquire the information in the first place (as the words and images are visually communicated). In the end, all aspects of cognitive semiotics come into play. However, these aspects are also heavily reliant on the implementation of cultural techniques and vice versa. Kramer and Bredekamp show this well by stating that:

> cultural techniques are promoting the achievements of intelligence through the senses and externalizing operationalization of thought processes. Cognition does not remain locked up in any invisible interiority; on the contrary, intelligence and spirit advance to become a kind of distributive, and hence, collective, phenomenon that is determined by the hands-on contact humans have with things and symbolic and technical artifacts (2013, p. 27)

Here, the inescapable connection between cognitive semiotics and cultural techniques is clear. When it comes to the use of linguistics, semiotics, and cognitive processes of cognitive semiotics of reading, one need only look as far as elementary cultural techniques to see a deep connection between the two.

Reading, and notably counting, is considered a basic or elementary cultural technique (Bayerlipp et al., 2018, p. 141; Dünne et al., 2020, p. 6; Siegert, 2015, p. 10; Winthrop-Young, 2013, p. 6). That is to say, they (reading and counting) are considered to be staple cultural techniques – techniques that were culturally formed and are culturally maintained in everyday life. These techniques provide the foundations for the bookshelf constructor and instruction reader with the know-how to read left-to-right, up-to-down, turn pages, and follow numbers in sequential order, among others. However, there is more know-how beyond elementary techniques that is needed with the BILLY instruction manual, including cultural techniques of grids, but even more so, of lists.

Lists (and Grids)

First, a short note on grids as cultural techniques. Grids are everywhere in human culture. You can see them on a large scale on maps (longitude and latitude), in how cities are laid out and how the streets intersect, but you can also see them on almost every printed or digital piece of media. In short, humans use the grids (and have been for a very long time) in numerous ways to 'order space' (Siegert, 2015, p.

102). It comes as no surprise then that the grid plays a role in the BILLY bookshelf's design and build. The shelf is designed in a grid formation with a rectangular frame and shelves that meet the frame at ninety-degree angles. It should be mentioned that the shelf is also designed to fit the grid of a room, in the grid of a house or apartment. It is important to have a thorough understanding of the prevalence of the grid as a cultural technique in relation to the surroundings of the BILLY bookcase because it helps to understand, first, how a cultural technique can be ingrained in multiple facets of culture without our noticing on a regular basis and, second, it is a technique that provides the structure for other techniques. To this point, the use of the grid of most interest here is in the instructions themselves.

Grids can be seen in the instruction layout as with any similar media. There are margins and clear divisions on the pages as well as between the pages, not to mention the grid that automatically accompanies typography (see Siegert, 2015, pp. 24–28). However, it is how the grid aids in the recognition of a list, another cultural technique, that is of note here. Without a grid, lists would not be recognizable. It is the placement and displacement of information on a page, according to the set grid, that makes one notice a list formation. Lists do not follow the "structures that govern the oral tradition" (Young, 2017, p. 24), nor that of general written language, such as grammar. Meaning is conveyed in the spatial, rather than the grammatical. In other words, "any list forges connections between its contents—even if just the basic fact of being placed together—that did not exist prior to the act of listing" (Young, 2017, p. 45). But lists do more than create connections. As Young (2017) points out, lists simplify information (2017, p. 39), bring order to otherwise disparate information (2017, p. 30), and produce "actionable instructions that determine future trajectories" (2017, p. 34). It is not difficult to see how instructions and lists are related. One could even say that instructions are simply lists of steps to be followed and in very simple terms, this would be correct. However, when looked at more deeply, instructions are so much more.

More Than a List – Instructions

I should start by pointing out that instruction manuals are a cultural technique in and of themselves. More than this, printed (or digital) instructions "represent a layman's ultimate form of access to implicit *tacit knowledge*" (Vismann, 2013, p. 88 original emphasis). Not only are they a cultural technique, but they also record and reproduce cultural techniques. In this sense, one could argue that, given the BILLY bookcase's prevalence in culture, its construction could, or perhaps already has, become a cultural technique. But that is an argument for another time. For now, we will stick to addressing the instructions themselves.

To investigate instructions, and understand and implement them further, many cognitive semiotic processes need addressing. Here, the importance of knowledge management and prior knowledge, information linking and multimodal understanding, and the narrative ability of images are addressed.

Knowledge Management and Prior Knowledge

When reading and understanding instruction manuals a distinction between information and knowledge must be made. That is to say, "the crucial distinction between information and knowledge is interpretation" (Sjarbaini & Jorna, 2013, p. 175). This act of interpretation is "carried out by humans as information processing systems. It implies a cognitive perspective on knowledge, both in its use and in its creation" (Sjarbaini & Jorna, 2013, p. 175). This means that knowledge is needed to both understand instructions and carry them out.

A study by Kim and Yang (2020) addressed these topics in reference to students following a lab manual properly. Kim and Yang found that background knowledge played one, if not the most important role, in a student's ability to successfully carry out the instructions. Kim and Yang also point out that "on the other hand, if background knowledge is lacking, reasoning is needed to understand the manual. Given that this reasoning can be wrong, the effectiveness of manual processing largely depends on the amount of background knowledge a participant has" (2020, p. 8). As manuals use visualizations in hopes of reducing cognitive load, background, or prior knowledge of the actions and tools indicated are needed for correct application. As such, proper knowledge management is critical in order to apply the correct knowledge to the situation at hand (in this case the BILLY bookcase). Something as simple as the basic understanding that the instructions are for a bookcase help to pull the appropriate prior knowledge to the forefront of the reader's mind for the instruction's interpretation.

Other key abilities needed to interpret instructions properly and apply the correct knowledge are information linking and multimodal understanding.

Information Linking and Multimodal Understanding

While applying prior knowledge is needed to successfully process information, being able to decipher what prior knowledge should be pulled from is of just as much importance. To do this, the reader has to be able to figure out what information belongs together and what new meanings are created by linking that specific information. Or as van Leeuwen (2005) put it, "the value of information lies

in its relation to its context: information can only be interpreted in the context of other pieces of information and of specific communicative interests and purposes" (2005, p. 219). Context is key here. Deciphering what information the reader sees and interprets is highly dependent on presuppositions, assumptions, and inferences (among many other things) within a given context (see Barnes et al., 1996). Without context, the BILLY instructions are no more than images and numbers on paper. In fact, nowhere on the instruction's cover does it mention that they are instructions (see figure 1). The only place the instruction booklet mentions instructions is at the end of the warning, in very small font, and could arguably refer to items not provided by IKEA, and not to the BILLY instructions in particular (see figure 2). In the end, it is the context of the reader's engagement with the instructions that provides the necessary information to conclude that they are instructions for building the BILLY bookcase.
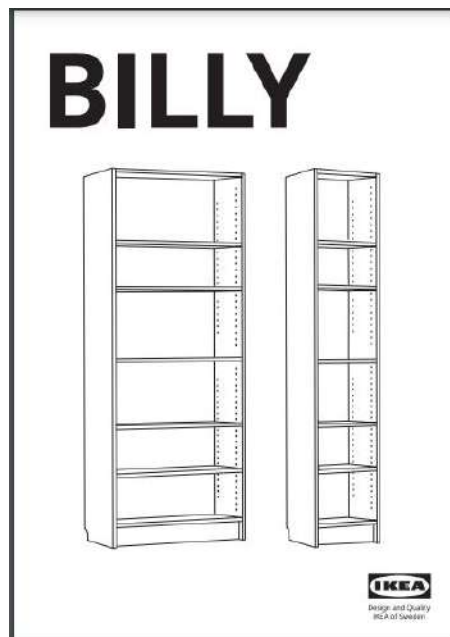

Figure 1 - Front cover of the BILLY bookcase instructions without mention of 'instructions' (IKEA, 2021, p. 1)
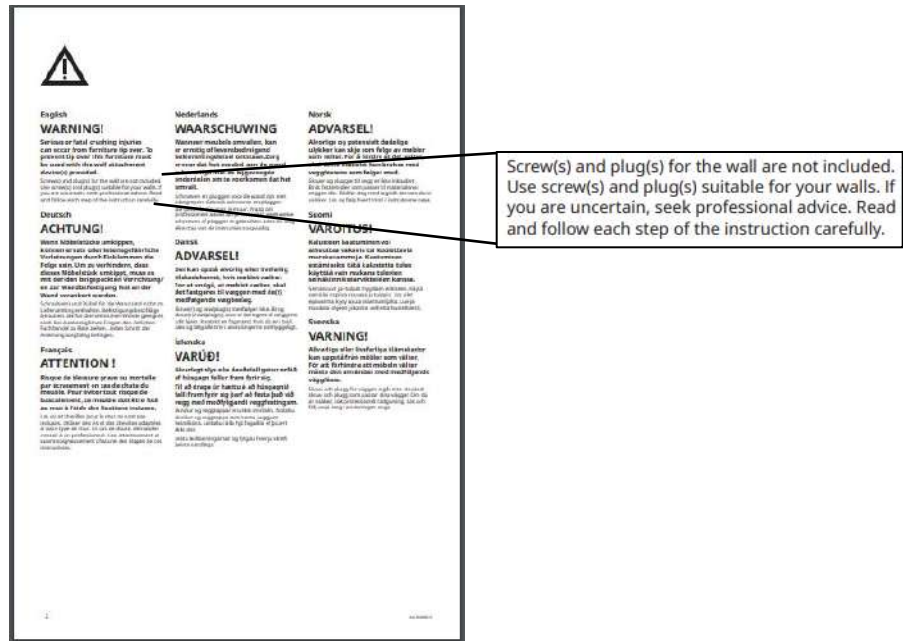
Figure 2 - Warning page of the instruction booklet that mentions 'instruction' (IKEA, 2021, p. 2)

However, recognizing the instructions as such is only the beginning. Once the front cover is opened and the warning read, the rest of the instructions contain only images, numbers, signs, and symbols. It is important to understand that well-designed multimedia instructions are "sensitive to what we know about how people process information" (Mayer, 2022, p. 58) and that this includes accounting for limited capacity and active processing (2022, pp. 60–61). Limited capacity takes into consideration how short the working memory of a person is and stresses that:

> the constraints on our processing capacity force us to make decisions about which pieces of incoming information to pay attention to, the degree to which we should build connections among the selected pieces of information, and the degree to which we should build connections between selected pieces of information and our existing knowledge (Mayer, 2022, p. 61)

To combat this limited capacity, instructional information needs to be kept as simple as possible. The creators of the BILLY bookcase instructions decided on a format that omitted words. This could be due to the consideration of illiterate constructors of the bookcase, but it is more likely due to cost restraints on publishing instructions in all thirty-seven languages and the ease of building a 3-dimensional object with like images rather than words. Still, one does not negate the other and the instructions are, in the end, useable by readers of the thirty-seven languages as well as the relatively illiterate (assuming their ability to recognize numbers).

Because there is such a high reliance put on understanding images, numbers, signs, and symbols, context is once again key. This time active processing plays the lead role. Active processing involves "paying attention to relevant incoming information, organizing incoming information into a coherent cognitive structure, and integrating incoming information with other knowledge" (Mayer, 2022, p. 61). The importance of these abilities can be seen in the use of the 'x' symbols throughout the instructions. In many places in the instructions, the 'x' symbolizes multiplication as in the parts section (see figure 3). Here, it is understood that the 'x' refers to how many of each piece should be included in the building kit. This is similarly true for steps 4 and 5 (see figure 4) where the number of pieces needed is communicated with an 'x'. However, on the same page or even within the same sections, an 'x' is used to denote another meaning – that is, what not to do (figures 3 and 4). In yet another section, the tools section (see figure 5), an 'x' signifies a Phillips-head screwdriver. This is a perfect example of the need to actively process information in order to decipher information appropriately by using prior knowledge along with the context of the situation.
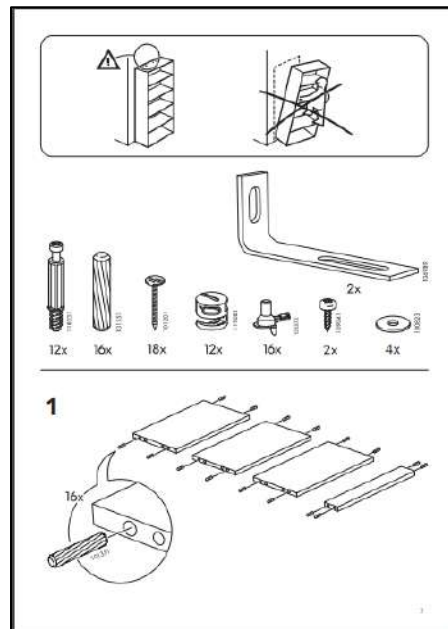

Figure 3 - Parts needed and their number denoted by 'x' but also what not to do (IKEA, 2021, p. 7)
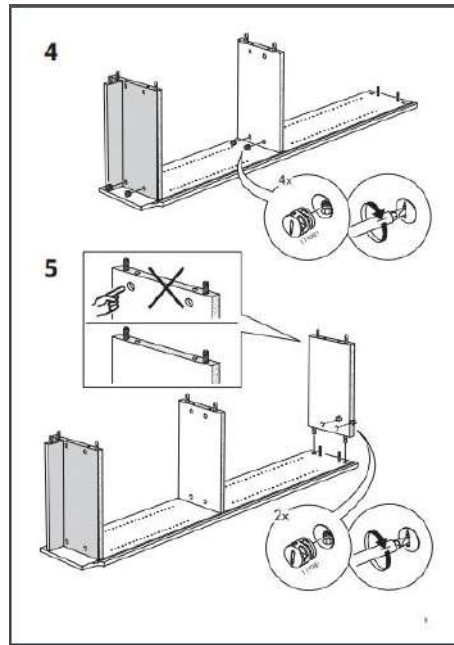
Figure 4 - Steps 4 and 5 showing the number of pieces needed and what not to do with an 'x' (IKEA, 2021, p. 9)
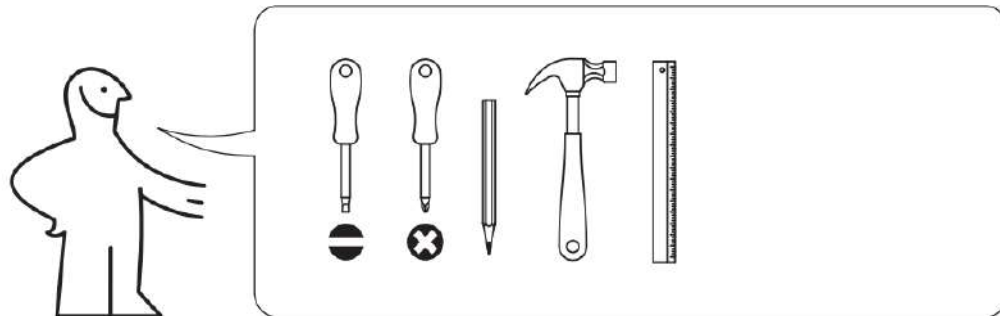

Figure 5 - Tools needed for the bookcase assembly using 'x' to signify a Phillips-head screwdriver (IKEA, 2021, p. 6)

One last cognitive process in need of mention is in relation to the recognition of step-by-step instructions as chronological and temporal, otherwise, the information would be meaningless (van Leeuwen, 2005, p. 219).

Narrative Images

Some of the information in the instructions are not necessarily chronological or temporal such as the 'dos and don'ts' section (see figure 6). However, the simple fact that the pages are put in the order they are in the booklet automatically suggests a temporality – start at the beginning and go to the end. Following this route, the

constructor of the bookshelf is first shown what the final product will or should look like, followed by the warning section, then the 'tools needed section' (figure 5), 'dos and don'ts' (figure 6 and at the top of figure 3), pieces included (figure 3) and then, only after the constructor has all the tools and pieces needed and is sure not to do any of the 'don'ts', do the numbered steps begin. The numbers, then, show a change. Everything before was in preparation to put the shelf together, now the assembly really begins. This is particularly important given that "narrativity is a function of the features of the image, the viewer's knowledge of context and cognitive activities …[and] it is the potential for material realization that makes narratives capable of being communicated and, in many cases, collaboratively created by participants in interaction" (Maagaard, 2018, pp. 4–5). As such, understanding the temporal narrative of the instructions is once again dependent on the constructor's ability to understand the context and apply the appropriate prior knowledge. Much like how it is easier to navigate in the real world with a map and, vise-vera, to understand a map with real world landmarks (for more on maps see Livingstone, 2003, pp. 153–163), having a material realization (i.e. the physical bookcase parts and pieces) helps the constructor to see the correct narration for its proper assembly through the instructions.

Figure 6 - Dos and don'ts (IKEA, 2021, p. 6)

Maagaard (2018) puts great emphasis on contextual knowledge in understanding narrative images (2018, pp. 9–13). This is true not only for the instructions in general and the steps but also within the steps in regard to movement. Contextual knowledge is needed, just as it was for the x's, to properly understand what is being depicted. For example, in instances like step 1 (figure 3) simple lines are used to indicate putting the doweling in the holes. In other situations, such as in steps 5 and 9, arrows are used to show action in the appropriate direction (see figures 7 and 8). In either case, understanding what is being depicted by using past knowledge, context and active processing is needed to fully comprehend the BILLY bookcase instructions.
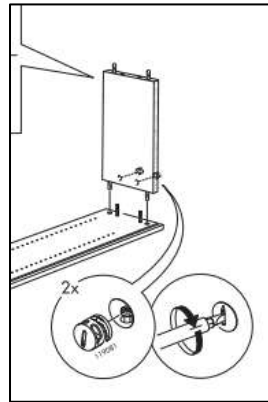
Figure 7 - Arrow depicting the appropriate motion and direction (IKEA, 2021, p. 9)
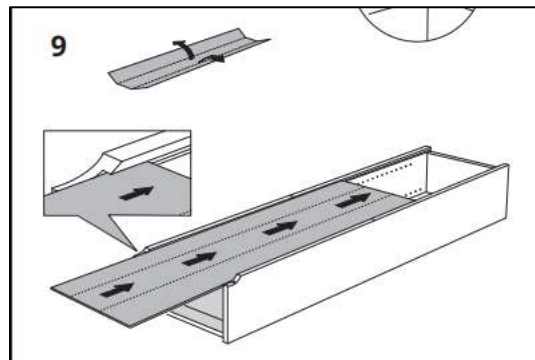
Figure 8 - Arrows showing actions of unfolding and proper direction

(IKEA, 2021, p. 11)

Instructions can be looked at as a medley of cultural techniques – reading, counting, grids, lists, and instructions themselves – but they can also be looked at from a cognitive semiotic angle where language, semiotics, and many cognitive processes converge. However, both are needed for the instructions to be understood and interpreted properly by the assembler. So then, what happens when implementation becomes a factor – when one begins to 'do'?

Doing: Building BILLY

When we get to the nuts and bolts of physically putting the bookcase together by following the instructions (and the multiple techniques and processes that go into that alone) the body and tools become salient elements.

The Body: Techniques and Operational Intentionality

As Mauss (1973) aptly stated "the body is man's first and most natural instrument...man's first and most natural technical object, and at the same time technical means, is his body" (1973, p. 75). Mauss's work on les techniques du corps, or techniques of the body, is said to always already be in cultural techniques (Siegert, 2015, p. 14). As an inherent part of cultural techniques, it is interesting how the view from cognitive semiotics sees the body and its use in much the same way. In an article in the journal Cognitive Semiotics, Woelert (2014) states that "prior to effectively using external tools, human agents technically engage their environment directly by way of their own body" (2014, p. 232). However, there are different levels to the use of the body and especially the use of the body with tools as mediators. When it comes to the body, there are "actions that are more or less habitual and more or less ancient in the life of the individual and the history of the society" (Mauss, 1973, p. 85). These uses of the body are perhaps what Woelert (2014) refers to as direct or basic operational intentionality where "intentionality becoming manifest in and through an embodied agent's movements effectively functions without involving or requiring any explicit recourse to or mediation by representational or objectifying cognitive functions" (2014, p. 232). This kind of bodily movement, technique, or operational intentionality is ingrained to the point of being automatic – done without conscious cognitive functioning – such as reaching for or gripping a tool. In order to build the BILLY bookcase, we must use these bodily movements, but we must also go much further beyond them to conscious tool-mediated movements and techniques.

Materially Mediated Operational Intentionality

In cultural techniques there is an understanding that "operators are not simply passive objects to be used or activated according to the whim of an acting (human) subject. Media and things supply their own rules of execution" (Young, 2017, p. 40). That is to say that the tools we use dictate how we use them. This also applies to the bookcase pieces where "the rules regarding proper usage [here, instructions] cannot be ignored" (Vismann, 2013, p. 88), otherwise, the bookcase will not be built properly or usable. In this sense, the instructions "not only communicate, they produce what

they communicate" (Krämer & Bredekamp, 2013, p. 24). Although this may seem like a natural result of following instructions, all of the things (parts, pieces, tools) along the way also act, along with the body, to make it so. Techniques are, after all, where "tool, body, and act converge" (Young, 2017, p. 40). Still, there is more than one way to enact as well as different levels of cognition needed to enact them. In relation to tool use and tools as mediators, these enactments are separated into operational intentionality toward direct motor function or indirect motor function.

Tools: Direct Motor Function

When tools come into play, cognition and cultural techniques must work together to accomplish the goal. Woelert (2014) explains that using tools is a cognitively demanding activity that:

> can be neither completely nor directly derived from an individual human agent's basic, embodied operative intentionality alone. At the very least, it cannot be derived from any type of operative intentionality that becomes directly manifest, prior to any form of training and learning (2014, p. 235)

Put another way, the ability to use any tool comes from what is "an operational know-how, which can be learned and passed on to others" (Vismann, 2013, p. 87) – i.e. cultural techniques.

This becomes clear by how we know to use the hammer listed in the 'needed tools' list to force pieces into position (ex. a stubborn piece of dowel) rather than the pencil or ruler listed in the same section. Not to mention the fact that we know to hold the hammer by the handle and not the head as well as the fact that we know to 'swing' the hammer. Incidentally, swinging a hammer is an example of direct motor function operational intentionality. That is, the use of the tool is "based on the direct transmission of muscular power to an external tool, where the tool directly extends the movement performed by the hands and arms of the body" (Woelert, 2014, p. 238). The hammer falls into this category because it moves in much the same way our body would move to accomplish the same goal – hitting the end of the doweling down – the movement is no different than if we attempted to do so with a clenched fist than with a hammer. Using a hammer takes cognitive effort because although it extends our body's reach and ability, it also changes the locus of movement from our own ingrained 'natural' bodily movements to the tool (Woelert, 2014, p. 234); however, there are other tools and movements that require an even higher level of cognitive effort, and by default, rely more on cultural techniques.

Tools: Indirect Motor Function

It is with indirect motor function operational intentionality that the tool gains more agency (Woelert, 2014, p. 240). The tool that best exemplifies this with the BILLY bookcase is the screwdriver. The difference between the hammer and the screwdriver is how the screwdriver does not replicate a bodily technique to accomplish the goal. In order to get the screw to recess into the bookcase pieces it has to be turned in a circular motion. The hammer hits down to force the dowel down, but the screwdriver turns in a circle to force the screw down. This requires much more cognition to perform as well as prior knowledge of cultural techniques. The simple knowledge that screws screw in clockwise and out counterclockwise is foundational to the cultural technique that is screw driving. This also brings us back to the agency of the tool in that the screwdriver "functions as a material entity that 'actively' mediates and transforms a human agent's own operative intentionality" (Woelert, 2014, p. 241). As such, the tools and other pieces of the bookshelf dictate how they can and will be put together based on the assembler's cognitive abilities and collection of cultural techniques.

To sum up, the 'doing' part of following the BILLY bookshelf instructions, mirrors the 'reading' part. Any assembler requires both cultural techniques and the ability to apply all aspects of cognitive semiotics to succeed in its construction. Cultural techniques in body use and tools use are both required to assemble the bookshelf at any step in the building process. Likewise, cognition and semiotic interpretation, along with number recognition, are needed to replicate the images in the instructions on the physical pieces through the use of both direct and indirect motor functions.

Conclusion

The BILLY bookcase instruction manual and its application to the bookcase's assembly, show how cultural techniques and cognitive semiotic processes are not simply interrelated and dependent on each other, but so much more. It shows how cognitive semiotics and cultural techniques are coexistent, mutually dependent, symbiotic, and concurrent when reading, following, and applying instructions. One cannot occur without some aspect of the other.

 Furthermore, one can assume that this is ubiquitous in instruction manuals and indeed in many more instances in everyday life. Think of cooking and baking where recipes are followed and tools of all kinds are implemented (i.e. spatulas, whisks, pans, ovens, etc.), or sewing where a pattern is followed and scissors, sewing

machines and irons are used. There are sure to be many instances where human beings find themselves in a very similar situation as attempting to assemble the BILLY bookcase, and in every one of those situations, they are bound to rely on their ability to merge their repertoire of cultural techniques and all the processes involved in linguistic, semiotic, and cognitive understanding of complex, step-based, activities. Cultural techniques and cognitive semiotic processes are not the same, interchangeable, or two sides of the same coin. However, they are entwined with each other and are ultimately equally relied upon to accomplish many tasks, mentally or physically. And while they are separate and very different frameworks, perhaps future studies that incorporate their dual approach could provide some interesting and novel results.

By looking at how frameworks can work and fit together instead of focusing on how and where they differ, we can reap the benefits of both (or many) at once, see how they influence and are influenced by our everyday lives, and help us to build more compete, sturdy, and dependable frameworks. Just like the BILLY bookcase, by incorporating instructions, tools, and parts – or multiple frameworks, ourselves, and everyday life events – the best cases are built.

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Tangled subjectivities: African hair braiding and nonfigurative media

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Abstract:
Interest in the social and cultural significance of sub-saharan African hairstyles such as cornrows, box braids, and bantu knots has enjoyed a resurgence (Edwards, 2020). Although it has historically been dismissed as a frivolous site of study, there exists scholarship invested in understanding hair as more than a "dead margin of the self" (Kwint et al., 1999, p. 9; Thrift, 2008) in order to focus on the cultural and social significance of hair (see Bradford et al., 2019; Byrd & Tharps, 2014; Holton, 2020; Kwint et al., 1999; Omotoso, 2015, 2018; Rosado, 2003; Watson, 2010; Weitz, 2004). The renewed popularity of this kind of scholarship has been accompanied by an increased interest in the relationship between African hairstyles, racialization, and cultural identity. Similarly, there have been subdued but nonetheless important attempts in the fields of computer science, ethnocomputing, and ethnomathematics to study how indigenous cultural practices such as hair braiding can be used to situate Black cosmetologists and hair braiders as STEM experts in their own right (Lachney et al, 2020). This paper argues that African hair braiding relies on the transmission of cultural and ethnomathematical knowledges that, while nonfigurative and abstract, continue to animate diasporic ontologies and epistemologies. Furthermore, I argue that African hair braiding as it is practiced throughout the Black diaspora allows diasporic subjects to negotiate their being in the world by interacting with a medium which has historically been rife with meaning. This paper highlights the relationship between ethnomathematics, ethnocomputing and social and cultural phenomena. It positions African hair braiding as a mode of mediation that exists within a larger media ecology consisting of social, spiritual, and communicative practices that have emerged (and re-emerge) both on the African continent and throughout the diaspora by mobilizing the unconscious for moments of diasporic transindividuation.

Keywords:
Nonfigufative media; diaspora; black studies.

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Interest in the social and cultural significance of sub-Saharan African hairstyles such as cornrows, box braids, and bantu knots has enjoyed a resurgence (Edwards, 2020). Although it has historically been dismissed as a trivial site of study, I share an investment in understanding hair as more than a "dead margin of the self" with scholars such as Marius Kwint (Kwint, Breward & Aynsley, 1999, p. 9; Thrift, 2008). Indeed, hair has often been dismissed in favour of the skin in "geographies of the body" (Holton, 2020). This perceived frivolousness is erroneous, according to Mark Holton (2020), since hair can serve "as a new geographical prism through which the frontiers of the body as bordered, marginal spaces can be extended and re-imagined" (p. 567).

This paper focuses on ancestral African hairstyles, which I define as any hairstyle originating in pre-colonial 'West and Central Africa,' that have also been documented in the Black diaspora. These include but are not limited to box braids, cornrows, Fulani braids, Senegalese twists, and Bantu knots. This paper is invested in situating the re-emergence of ancestral African hairstyles as evidence of linkages between Africa and its diasporas to temper accounts of the Middle Passage as having essentially erased the cultural identities of enslaved Africans, turning them into a kind of tabula rasa (Warner-Lewis, 1991, 1997, 2003). Furthermore, it sits at the intersection of fields such as cultural anthropology, critical race theory, ethnomathematics, and communications studies in arguing that African hair braiding relies on the transmission of cultural and ethnomathematical knowledge that, while nonfigurative and abstract, continue to animate diasporic ontologies and epistemologies. In doing so, I trace an alternate history of the emergence of computing which has historically been characterized by a focus on "Western" contributions to the development of computing. I further argue that African hair braiding, as practiced throughout the Black diaspora, allows diasporic subjects to negotiate their being in the world by interacting with a medium that has historically been rife with meaning. While I have discussed the role of hair braiding as a tool for diasporic transindividuation elsewhere (see Nyela, 2021), I extend this argument to posit that the recreation of 'ancestral African hairstyles' in and outside of West/Central Africa acts as a mode of ontological worlding. While one could argue that cornrows and box braids are not necessarily pictographic in nature, they figure an ontological mode of becoming that negotiates dimensions of "belonging and (un)belonging" that are themselves relational in nature (Nyela, 2021).

History of Black hair redux

Academic and mainstream writing tends to focus on the cultural and social significance of hair (see Bradford et al., 2021; Byrd & Tharps, 2014; Holton, 2020;

Kwint et al., 1999; Omotoso, 2015, 2018; Rosado, 2003; Watson, 2010; Weitz, 2004). This has been accompanied by increasing interest in the relationship between ancestral African hairstyles, racialization, and cultural identity. This trajectory has also been observed in cultural anthropology and critical race studies, although most of the research in these fields have focused on how cultural meanings are retained or modified through the reappropriation of ancestral African hairstyles and hair grooming methods (Byrd & Tharps, 2014; Omotoso, 2015, 2018; Thompson, 2009).

Adetutu Omotoso (2015, 2018) notes that as the highest point on a person's body, many West and Central African ethnic groups saw hair as providing direct access to the spiritual and the divine. Similarly, Ayana D. Byrd and Lori L. Tharps' (2014) describe the importance across West and Central African ethnic groups. Their socio-historical account of Black hair provides a glimpse into the multifaceted nature of Black hair which, on the one hand, was believed to be potent enough to strengthen the potions of Cameroonian healing men (ibid). On the other, the Wolof women of Nigeria were believed to be able to "drive men insane" by summoning their spirit which was believed resides in their hair (ibid). Additionally, hair served as a socio-cultural marker that identified various social roles and positions such as marital status, ethnic and tribal belonging (ibid). They note that the myriad of social attributes that could be read in hair impressed early explorers, such as the Dutch, who wrote extensively about the significance of these hairstyles (Byrd & Tharps, 2014). In Benin, for example, European explorers noted as many as 16 hairstyles, indicating "a combination of gender and status" in multiple tribes (Byrd & Tharps, 2014, p. 9). Furthermore, they note that unkept and/or dirty hair was frowned upon by most ethnic groups. The awe displayed towards the intricacies of these hairstyles, their role as social classifiers, and a recognition of the potential threat that could be posed by hair and its importance was reinforced by the fact that many slave traders would cut the hair of kidnapped Africans in attempts to erase their identities and prevent them from reproducing the social arrangements through which they governed themselves prior to their enslavement[1] (Byrd & Tharps, 2014, p. 11; Dash, 2006).

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[1] Caribbean sociolinguist Maureen Warner-Lewis (2003) notes that slave traders' preference for specific countries and ethnic groups meant that they were largely unsuccessful in avoiding "ethnic clustering" (pp. 58-59). This, in turn, allowed enslaved Africans to sustain many of the traditions and cultural rites they practiced in Africa. She identifies multiple cultural practices which originated in West and Central Africa that were also recorded in the Caribbean including: naming practices, games,

The transatlantic slave trade, the Scramble for Africa, and the subsequent emancipation of Black people across European colonies were not without their effects on Black hair. As race science and racial hierarchies reached scientific consensus, in colonial science, phenotypical characteristics such as hair texture became classified through racist typologies that placed Black hair closer to animal hair and coats such as wool (Brown, 2018; Dash, 2006; DeLongoria, 2018; Thompson, 2009). Subsequently, Black hair was categorized as either 'good' or 'bad,' with 'good' hair identifying hair textures that best resembled and approximated European hair. Although it would be foolish to believe that all Black people accepted the idea that their hair was an outward symbol of their inherent inferiority, it is clear that the transatlantic slave trade transformed Black Americans' relationship with their hair. Similar strenuous relationships have been observed across the African continent and throughout the diaspora (Badillo, 2001; DeLongoria, 2018; Rosado, 2003). The Afro, box braids and locs have also been identified as means to assert affiliation to political movements such as Pan Africanism and Black pride (Brown, 2018; Byrd & Tharps, 2014; Dash, 2006). The Afro is especially interesting since it actively "exploits the characteristics of Black hair and is therefore not replicable by those who do not have thick, kinky hair without altering the chemical structure of the hair itself" (Nyela, 2021). As such, one can frame the adoption of 'ancestral African hairstyles' as a way of reclaiming one's Black identity or to indicate an interest in learning about one's African heritage (see Byrd & Tharps, 2014; Rosado, 2003, 2007; Thompson, 2009).

Diasporic transindividuation and Black hair as cosmotechnics

Given the significance that hair has and continues to play for Black people across the globe, studying Black hair necessitates developing a theoretical approach that takes into account the interconnectedness of Black folks on the continent and in the diaspora. This would also involve a reconsideration of commonly held beliefs about hair and its role as a sociocultural marker, as well as an account of how Black folks "conceptualize, interpret, and apprehend reality within the context of African cultural or collective experiences" (Anyanwu, 1983, p. 60 in Omotoso, 2018). Like

grooming practices, and culinary habits. Her wider claim supports the idea of cultural transmission between the African continent and its diasporas and refuses the argument of "cultural nakedness" prevalent in Caribbean sociolinguistics at the time (Warner-Lewis, 2003, pp. xxvii–xxviii).

Omotoso (2018), I posit that "an African philosophy of hair addresses both the physical and spiritual features of hair in its capacity as a tool for identity building" (Nyela, 2021, p. 27). The remainder of this paper will focus on arguing that braided 'ancestral African hairstyles' act as a mode of mediation which disrupt space-time by opening up chronotopic spaces (Peeren, 2006) where "identity, race, and (un)belonging come to a head" (Nyela, 2021, p. 103). Peeren (2006) defines chronotopic practices as those practices which "interpellate subjects in(to) collective spaces and in(to) collective time through specific spatial and temporal norms" and cultural practices (p. 71). Furthermore, she proposes that chronotropic spaces are created for the purpose of symbolic reterritorialization and predicated on a construction of time and space where the diasporic subject can reclaim parts of their identity. Positioning hair as a medium begs the questions: what agency does hair have and how does it enact that agency? How might that agency be mobilized for the purposes of collective individuation? Answering these questions necessitates a positioning of hair as a chronotropic practice. Because the diasporic subject experiences "conflict between the way time-space constructions governed subjectivity, community and memory in the homeland and the way they govern subjectivity, community and memory in the place of dispersal", the fostering of chronotropic spaces is necessary in displacing spatial and temporal barriers between diasporic subjects and their ancestors (Peeren, 2006, p. 74).

While there is some debate about the relevance of including such practices in histories of computing, there are those who have continued to work to bring these alternative accounts to life. Arguments about the relationship between weaving, specifically the Jacquard mechanism, and the development of modern computing have disrupted traditional accounts of the history of algorithmic processing. In fact, this work considers the Jacquard mechanism one of the earliest in a long list of predecessors to the modern computer (see Davis & Davis, 2005; Langlois, 2019). Writing on the role of the Jacquard mechanism in algorithmic processing has been corroborated by Brian Randell (1994) and James Essinger (2007), who has written extensively on Charles Babbage's use of Jacquard punch cards in the development of his Analytical Engine. Furthermore, Emma Cocker (2017) has written extensively on the shared "modes of attention" linking live coding and weaving through the Weaving Codes/Coding Weaves project. She writes that both:

> live coding and ancient weaving operate at the threshold or meeting point between the prior knowledge of a process (what can be predicted or anticipated in advance), the tacit knowledge (an embodied "know-how" activated in its performance), and a *kairotic* knowledge (a "know when" yet arguably known-not

knowledge that emerges simultaneous to—unique and in complete
fidelity to—the emergent situation) (Cocker, 2017, p. 136).

In ethnomathematics, Ron Eglash's (1997, 1999) work highlights the
relationship between African fractals, which are "characterized by the repetition of
similar patterns at ever-diminishing scales" (p. 4), and modern computing. These
fractal patterns were observed throughout West/Central African communities,
influencing the design of villages and woven fabric such as Kente cloth and
hairstyles. Eglash (1999) notes that although fractal geometry was also developed in
Europe, those fractal designs are "mostly due to imitation of nature" (p. 48).
Intentional rather than tacit, unconscious knowledge allowed for the development
of geometric algorithms that extend beyond "classical or Euclidean geometry"
(Bangura, 2011; Eglash, 1999). The dismissal of fractal geometry in the history of
early computing is mistaken, according to Eglash (1999), since it plays a major role
in modern computer modelling processes. Furthermore, thinking about the
development of non-Euclidean geometry vis-à-vis artistic practices such as hair
braiding unsettles the rigidity surrounding what counts as technological
development. Fractal geometry, as it is mobilize in hair braiding, relies on the
translation of information and complex pattern recognition which is also central to
modern computing (Bangura, 2011; Eglash, 1999; Garvey, 2021; Langlois, 2019).
Understanding this relationship also highlights how media and technological
development do not emerge outside the cultural context but rather in tandem with
cultural phenomena. Having briefly described the relationship between African
fractals, the Jacquard mechanism and computing, I will spend some time discussing
the role of hair braiding as a mode of ontological *worlding* in line with Descola's four
modes of ontological figuration and its implications for Black diasporic subjects.

French anthropologist Phillpe Descola (2021) identifies the following four
modes of figuration (animism, totemism, analogism, and naturalism) in his recently
published Les Formes du visible: une anthropologie de la figuration. As a worlding
practice, figuration makes relationships between actants, whether human or non-
human, come to the fore in ways that reflect their being in the world. Figuration
makes visible how ontological frameworks of reality acquire meaning through
images[2]. Understanding figuration as a mode of ontological representation

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[2] For Descola (2021) figuration is a process of making-into-a-picture a being, a ritual, or a belief
through an iconic sign (*signe iconique*) (p. 29). It produces images or at least shapes and patterns that

highlights the existence of multiple ontologies. While figuration itself is universal (i.e., all people make the world intelligible to themselves), the ways in which this process takes place and what it illuminates can differ exponentially. It is also important to note that some braiders have developed braiding styles that allow them to braid hair into pictographic shapes such as hearts and more intricate designs.

This yet unnamed mode of figuration[3] acts on the plane of immanence as mobilized by Laura Marks (2010) as "a strategy of survival, for concepts, such as pots buried in the earth" (p. 27). As a mode of figuration, African hair braiding creates moments of possibility where the effects of colonialism are temporarily made irrelevant. Without proposing a sort of biological positivism that posits that Blackness engenders this mode of becoming, I argue that it is rather the experiences of moving through the world as a Black diasporic subject that makes this figuration possible In understanding that the experience of anti-Blackness is itself a shared reality, the ways in which legacies of colonialism, slavery, and racism have forged something akin to an invisible string which connects Black diasporic subjects becomes readily apparent (see Bhabha, 2004; Fanon, 1968; Hall, 2018). The braiding of hair connects us in ways that dismantle the barriers erected by colonialism and anti-Blackness through kinship and intimacy. Hairstyles recreated by non-Black subjects fail to engage with the mode of ontological worlding that makes diasporic transindividuation possible. Precisely because, as a mode of ontological worlding, ancestral African hairstyles reflects the resilience of Black diasporic subjects which cannot be accessed by simply recreating a hairstyle. The appropriation short-circuits, in part, because it is fails to create the circumstances necessary for these hairstyles to act in any transformative or repatarive way.

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are recognizable pictorially. While resemblance to the 'natural' world is not a necessity in all modes of figuration (it is most important in modernism), one can be trained to identify and recognize different modes of figurative representation. Descola rejects the perceived evolutionary primacy of the Western mode of figuration (modernism) in favour of an approach to figuration which positions it not as the result of a universal 'cultural trajectory' but rather a means to call attention to how the world makes itself come-to-presence in different ways.

[3] While hair braiding is pictorial, it is nonfigurative insofar as it is a mode of figuration is not included as such in Descola's taxonomy.

Conclusion

This paper has argued that as it is practiced in West/Central Africa and the diaspora, African hair braiding allows diasporic subjects to negotiate their being in the world. In doing so, I have also highlighted the relationship between ethnomathematics, ethnocomputing and social and cultural phenomena. As more than a "dead margin of the self" (Kwint et al., 1999, p. 9) hair constantly oscillates between mundane and extraordinary. In turn, the approach developed in this paper builds on work happening inside and outside media studies to expand what is considered media. Expanding the way we think about technology to include practices such as hair braiding highlights how "hair braiding transforms hair by drawing on the shared past of diasporic subjects. Each strand of hair carries the weight of a people's history, braiding hair brings together these shared histories and transforms both the hair braider and the person whose hair is being braided" (Nyela, 2021, p. 108). In other words, it makes it possible to produce an understanding of hair braiding as transfigurative and technological beyond the realm of cultural transmission or repetition.

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Extra! Extra! Farm All About It!: Popular Press Coverage of

Farming Simulator

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Abstract:
While the number of individuals employed in the agriculture industry in Canada continues to decline, video games about farming have increased in popularity. One game in particular, *Farming Simulator*, allows people to play at farming through digital versions of tractors and combines, while also taking care of livestock, just as one would find on a real farm. The media has become an integral way to understand the labour of farmers, through popular television, movies and digital games. Therefore, I argue that popular press publications on farming games can influence the general public's understanding of *Farming Simulator* and agriculture broadly. Articles were collected using the Dow Jones Factiva database and the keyword "farming simulator", for an initial 1,053 publications as the dataset. Currently using qualitative content analysis and inductive thematic coding in the NVivo software, broad themes can be identified with an emerging codebook currently being developed. Due to the multiple contexts of the keyword "farming simulator", I focus my analysis on articles pertaining to the *Farming Simulator* game series. What is inferred presently is the press coverage of this game series primes the audience to view the game and farming negatively. Therefore, the way journalists report on simulation video games, *Farming Simulator* in particular, can impact the perception of these video games and the broader industry they draw their content from.

Keywords:
Farming Simulator, popular press, farming video games, qualitative content analysis, public perception

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Statistics Canada (2018, 2022) indicated the number of farm operators in Canada has continued to drop over the past years, with the most recent data (2022) showing 1.7% of the Canadian population employed within the agriculture industry. Despite this decline in the number of people working as farmers, farming-related video games have exploded in popularity. One game series in particular, *Farming Simulator* (FS), allows a growing audience to "play" at the work of farming using digital versions of tractors, combines and hay balers, just like one would find on a real farm; with the 2022 release, *Farming Simulator 22*, selling over three million copies (Williams, 2022). Throughout this paper, I make the claim that as the likelihood of personally interacting with a farmer continues to shrink, gaming media becomes an increasingly important gateway for audiences to understand agriculture labour.

Literature Review

The *Farming Simulator* game series is developed and published by Giants Software with a total of 14 base game releases. Since its initial release in 2008, the series has sold over 28 million copies of the game (Andric, 2023) and had over 90 million downloads (Staff, 2020). As I allude to, there is little academic literature surrounding the game itself, therefore this paper draws on larger bodies of literature such as the use of games for educational purposes and the representation of labour within simulation games.

Farming Games as Educational Resources

Farming, in the media, is portrayed as a more leisure or hobby activity (Sutherland, 2020), with the work occurring on the family farm – such as *Stardew Valley* (Kish & Peters, 2023). Despite this more laid-back representation, agriculture simulators – and other games – have been used within educational settings. One example is the use of these simulators as training for land-use mechanics (Gonzales, Cardille, & Parrott, 2013). This study compared the social aspect of social media farming games (e.g. *Farmville* and *Happy Farm*) and how it could be used to create a multiplayer learning environment for the land-use agriculture simulator.

Besides the educational value of learning new methods of land-use, it could also be argued that these games may also offer an opportunity to explore new technologies in-game that might not be available out of game (e.g. expensive to own or operate). For example, in *Farming Simulator*, machinery and equipment has been added into the game based on the real-world equivalent which might allow for farmers to "try out" the equipment. This could be an option as some farmers who play the game recreate their actual farm into the game. Another use of *Farming Simulator*

is the implementation of it within the classroom to educate students on what farming is like (Lane, 2018). Therefore, we can see how farming games are used as educational resources for students and farmers alike.

Representation of Labour in Simulation Games

Simulation games are a form of immersed interactive activity that can allow players the ability to "play" at a career (e.g. *Farming Simulator*, *Euro Truck Simulator*), hobby (e.g. *Cooking Simulator*, *PC Building Simulator*), or even as another entity (e.g. *Bee Simulator*, *Goat Simulator*). For this section, a focus will be on literature surrounding the representation of careers or occupations in games. Blue-collar work (Iantorno, Blamey, Dwyer, & Consalvo, 2021) and white-collar work (Buehler, 2018) have both been represented and examined within video games. Particularly, Iantorno, Blamey, Dwyer, & Consalvo (2021) examined games that had the jobs of cab driver, bar tender, janitor, and fireman as the focus, whereas Buehler (2018) explored the occupation of being a team manager on a sports game. Also, studying the attitudes and opinions of the *Farming Simulator* series has been underexplored from the general public's point of view, but has been explored from the perspective of real-world farmers (Walker, 2020). Therefore, there is a body of literature to support the exploration of how labour and occupations are represented in simulation games.

Press Coverage of Agriculture

Despite the lack of academic attention, FS has been discussed within the mainstream popular press. While newspaper reporting on farming tends to be more positive (or at least neutral) in its tone, for example the coverage of organic farming frequently focusing on the economic and consumer benefits of the practice (Cahill, More and Powell, 2010; Fiala, Freyer and Bingen, 2021); my findings indicate that coverage of the FS breaks from this neutral/positive pattern, with coverage trending negatively.

Methodology

To understand how *Farming Simulator* is discussed by the press, I collected articles from the Dow Jones Factiva database. Knowing how these games are talked about in the popular press can help us understand how people might perceive *Farming Simulator* and/or agriculture broadly. The Factiva database offers access to a range of articles from over 200 countries, in 32 languages, with information available through "newspapers, newswires, industry publications, websites,

company reports and more." (Dow Jones Factiva, 2023). The first download of articles dated between April 23, 2008 and December 9, 2022, where a total of 1,316 English language articles making reference to "farming simulator" appeared in popular newspapers and magazines. After removing duplicates, a total of 1,044 articles were collected. A second set of articles from December 7, 2022 to January 24, 2023 were collected as well, with another nine English language articles added to the dataset. A total of 1,053 articles were included in the dataset for analysis. The NVivo 14 software is being used to conduct inductive qualitative thematic coding, to sort the articles into larger parent categories, with child codes identified but not yet finalized. This project is still underway with about 47% of articles initially coded during the first pass through, however, broad themes and inferences can be identified at this stage. Justification for the ongoing nature of this study is due to the sheer number of articles being coded, along with the tedious task of identifying duplicates that were missed by the system and creating annotations for further coding and analysis.

Findings

The metadata from the articles shows that most were published in 2019, with a large portion of these published within the United Kingdom. The top three regions of article publishers are Europe, India and the United States. A preliminary codebook is as follows:

Parent Code	Child Codes	Examples
Descriptor	Keyword	"Farming Simulator 2012"
	Descriptor	"Farmville, a farming simulator on Facebook" "Rune Factory Frontier is tricky to define; part farming simulator, part action game, it's as much about building relationships with fellow inhabitants of Tranrupia as it is fighting in nearby dungeons."
Esports	Broadly	"If Farming Simulator can be played at a professional level, then just about any game can." "Take on the role of a farmer by harvesting crops in the popular Esports game Farming Simulator."
	Farming Simulator eSports League	"GIANTS Software kicks-off Farming Simulator League (FSL) Season 4!"
Play	Casual	"The selection includes casual games, "gamer"

		games such as Broken Sword and Shadowgrounds, children's games, and simulation games including Farming Simulator, France's top selling PC game in 2011."
	Education	"Would-be farmers will be able to learn new agri-technologies on a new content pack for the popular Farming Simulator 22 game released on 19 April, thanks in part to help from the University of Reading."
Brands/Sales	Publisher/Developer	"Farming Simulator (Giants Software)" "GIANTS Software is an international video game developer and publisher from Switzerland established in 2004 and known worldwide for creating the popular Farming Simulator series." "astragon's physical distribution revenues remain strong, boosted by a range of diverse titles across its portfolio including Farming Simulator, which continues to experience significant customer adoption in Germany"
	Gaming Platform (Sales)	"The quarter benefited from strong franchises like SnowRunner , Insurgency: Sandstorm , A Plague Tale: Innocence , while Farming Simulator's rights had expired over Q3 2021/22." "Among the bestselling new games last year on PC marketplace Steam was Farming Simulator 22, a lavishly crafted portrayal of agricultural affairs, from crop management to combine harvester worship." "The sale sees Farming Simulator 22 get a discount on the online storefront for the first time."
Digital Game	Reviews	"FARMING SIMULATOR PC, £24.99 2/5 FORGET your multi-million dollar shooters featuring authentic weapons and Hollywood voiceovers."
	Descriptions (Game Release/Press Release)	"Publisher and developer GIANTS Software delivers content en masse with the second Free Content Update for Farming Simulator 22. It's included in Patch 1.3, packed with eight new machines, features and optimizations."
	Software/Hardware	"The company announced that several other games are in the process of getting FSR 2.0 support, including Asterigos, Delysium, EVE Online, Farming Simulator 22, Forspoken,

		Grounded, Microsoft Flight Simulator, NiShuiHan, Perfect World Remake, Swordsman Remake, and Unknown 9: Awakening." "The latest version 1.7.1 patch of Farming Simulator 2022 implements FSR 2.1."
	Gaming Charts	"Recent hits * Aliens: Fireteam Elite * Forza Horizon 5 * As Dusk Falls * Citizen Sleeper * Back 4 Blood * Death's Door * Farming Simulator 22 (no, really)" "Read Best Farming Simulator Games for Android, iOS in 2021"

Using the keyword "farming simulator" brought forth a plethora of articles that vary in their use of the term. "Farming simulator" is both the name of the video game series (the focus of this paper) and a genre of video games (this term used as a descriptor for other types of farming games). Some articles, in the later part of the dataset, did mention esports in a certain capacity. After the introduction of the *Farming Simulator* eSports League (FSL) in 2019, the discourse of competitive farming (FSL) may draw interesting findings regarding how the games are discussed, but this is not a focus of this paper. Some articles included financial reports of the publisher and/or developer of the game series, so while these articles did not focus on the reporting or description of the video game series, they were used in the description of the company. In the final category, focusing on the digital game itself, includes articles on reviews of the game, press releases and/or game release information, new software and/or hardware updates the game support and articles reporting on the game charts. While these categories offer a broad overview of the topics of these articles, the four that would be beneficial to understanding how journalists and the public perceive *Farming Simulator* would fall under the child codes of "*Farming Simulator* eSports League", reviews of the game – or those type of games, game releases and press releases. These will be the focus of the discussion identified so far in this study.

Discussion

Game reviews are a popular avenue for journalists to explain how they perceive the game and have influence on the public as to which games should or should not be played. With a focus on farming video games – such as *Farming Simulator* – as a preliminary form of agriculture literacy, these games can help educate individuals on the livelihoods of farmers (Gonzales, Cardille, & Parrott, 2013; Lane, 2018). The keyword "farming simulator" can be used to describe both the name of a video game series, and a subsection of simulation type games. The dual nature of

"farming simulator" has made it difficult when coding because articles must be categorized between those about the game series and those about other farming games where the keyword is used as a descriptor.

While the other farming games might not be a focus of this paper, I find it important to note that when comparing the tone of articles, a grouping of articles was focused on non-FS farming games, such as *Harvest Moon*, *Stardew Valley* and *Stranded Sails*, these had a more neutral to positive tone. We see this similar positive/neutral tone to the newspaper coverage of organic farming as well (Cahill, More and Powell, 2010; Fiala, Freyer and Bingen, 2021). The inference is that farming games that are not as realistic to the real-world (e.g. *Farming Simulator*), tend to have a neutral/positive tone. This is due to the journalists' discussion of *Harvest Moon*, with statements like "Overall, Harvest Moon: Magical Melody is a great virtual farming simulator that will have you coming back for more" and "…it's the cutest farming simulator you'll ever play". And journalists reported that when playing *Stardew Valley*, "It's a serene experience and wildly engaging" and "Farming has never been so much fun or addicting." In this way, the game is spoken about positively by saying how engaging the game is and they will leave the player coming back for more. These games do not have as intricate of game mechanics as *Farming Simulator* does, which could also factor into how the games are discussed. For these farming simulators, they are spoken about positively by journalists.

When we look at the coverage of *Farming Simulator*, some articles were informational in nature, discussing coverage of the FS game being showcased at agriculture convention or shows (e.g. Houston Livestock Show) and its applicable of educating agricultural students through gameplay. However, a group of articles about FS include phrases like "Convert tedium job into entertainment", "Not good at traditional gaming but can play FS", "May not sound the most exciting", "Don't worry if you can't immediately see the appeal of this agricultural simulation – it's a grower" and "I'll be the first to admit this sounds awful". These statements come from articles about the game release or reviews of the game. Patch release announcements and articles ranking video games have also described the *Farming Simulator* video game series as one of the "Weirdest Sims on PC." I argue that the tone of this subset of articles leans more negative. The journalists describe how the tedious job (farming) is turned into entertainment, which can be read that farming is a dull occupation. In this way, the game may be entertaining, but the journalist still stated that the job itself is boring. Others reported that they are not good with traditional gaming, but they can play FS; leading us to believe that despite the intricate game mechanics, the game is viewed as easy. With the last few articles that I pulled using phrases like it's not the most exciting, don't worry if you can't see the appeal, and this sounds awful; I believe

these articles too are negative in tone. While the farming occupation may be repetitive (e.g. long days plowing, planting and harvesting fields) the game itself could be seen as entertainment but still "not the most exciting".

Here we can see a clear distinction between the way that farming simulator games like *Stardew Valley* and *Harvest Moon* are written about positively and encourage people to play the game, whereas *Farming Simulator* is written about as being mundane, leading to a more negative tone. Despite the ongoing coding process, for now I argue that the reader is primed to have a negative view of FS specifically based on the negative tone of press articles written in response to game releases, reviews, and patch updates. I will also make a small argument that due to the influence that media has on its audience and their perception of the world (Baruah, Somandepalli, & Narayanan, 2022), the negative tone when discussing *Farming Simulator* may bleed over to the broader field of agriculture. In this way, the popular press coverage of a video game could influence the audience's perception of the occupation it is based on. We can see a small connection when a journalist stated that it took a tedious job and turned it into entertainment, after a more thorough coding this argument may be stronger, but for now I leave it here to ponder.

Limitations & Future Work

Limitations to this study include the use of only one database where articles were collected, and the manual coding completed by one researcher. To make this project feasible as a short-term project, one database was used to collect articles. This allows for a more detailed analysis of the articles and eliminates the need for cross-referencing different databases to account for potential duplicate articles. Coding was completed by hand, without the use of automated coding tools that NVivo offers, so that duplicate articles would be identified and the context in which the articles mention "farming simulator" could be elaborated on within the annotations. After duplicates are removed from the dataset, it would be beneficial to have another researcher complete a coding sample to test for intercoder reliability.

For future researchers, it would be interesting to see how this codebook would be applicable the academic literature when using the keyword "farming simulator". Within game studies the keyword "farming" can be used in different contexts such as the content of the game, a mechanic within the game, or to describe a genre of games. Similarly, it would be interesting to see if this same codebook could be applied to examine how journalists talk about other simulation games. The idea of games turning a "tedious" job, such as truck driving, into a space where one can play at

another's livelihood can influence the way in which the public understands and perceives someone's livelihood.

Conclusion

The focus of this article was to analyze how journalists discuss the *Farming Simulator* video game series. The keyword "farming simulator" serves as a descriptive adjective, genre of games, serious play simulator and a title of a video game series. Due to the varied nature of articles that were curated from this search, those that speak directly about *Farming Simulator* are few and far between the others. *Farming Simulator* can be a form of preliminary agriculture literacy, in which audiences can learn about the basics of farming. This game has been used positively within educational settings for this purpose (Gonzales, Cardille, & Parrott, 2013; Lane, 2018). However, what I can infer in this study, as of presently, is that press coverage of the *Farming Simulator* game series primes the audience to view this game series, and farming more broadly, negatively. This can have negative implications as this can deter academics from studying the game as it may be deemed "not a real game" and may influence the public to perceive these games negatively. If this game can serve as a form of preliminary agriculture literacy, the public may not be influenced to engage in this game play because journalists paint it as a "weird simulator". Therefore, I finish with the conclusion that the way in which journalists talk about video games in their articles can have an impact on the way in which these games are or are not taken up by the public and how they perceive the broader industry the game is based on.

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From Passive Victims to Politicized Subjects: Exploring Visual Representations of Refugees Women

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Abstract:
Considering representation as a political and incomplete process, this paper aims to explore the visual representation of refugee women in three ways. First, I present a historical overview of the traditional media representation of refugees by focusing on the shifts in the figure of the refugees shaped by Western socio-visual imagery (Bleiker, 2018; Chouliariaki & Stolic, 2017; Johnson, 2011). Second, I critically explore the power imbalances embedded in visual documentation practices building upon Ariella Azoulay's new political ontology of photography. I explore photography as a set of relations between individuals within a photographic moment and/or other moments of engagement with images. I move beyond what photographs *show* by focusing on how they *function* in the world (Azoulay, 2008). Finally, I examine Sarah Cooper and Nina Gorfer's series of portraits of women affected by the refugee crisis called *Between These Folded Walls, Utopia* (2017-2020- Fotografiska). This project shifts the grammar of the sensible through structures that blur the line between fiction and reality to question the lack of or inappropriate representation of refugee women through a non-traditional narrative. I discuss this alternative representation, building on T. J. Demos' approach to documentation practices as a site of negotiation where the political is reinstituted into an aesthetic framework. Creative projects have the potential to articulate subjects' agency and reinvent "artistic possibilities of political engagement" (Demos, 2013, p. xxi). By examining the historical tradition of framing refugees as de-politicized subjects, I conclude Cooper and Gorfer's project creatively contests and reinvents documentary practices, framing refugee women in a space of political resistance.

Keywords:
Photography, Migration, Humanitarian, Feminist Aesthetics, Politics

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Photography, due to the widespread perception that it captures reality accurately and due to the illusion of authenticity that it creates, is used to document war, violations of human rights and humanitarian crises and to convey the meanings of these events to distant audiences (Bleiker, 2018; Hariman & Lucaites, 2016). Photography, when depicting crises, tends to avoid representing everyday life and focuses on portraying the human body as "vulnerable, under threat, in pain, or recovery" (Fehrenbach & Rodogno, 2015, p. 16). Most representations of distant suffering, particularly in NGO campaigns and Western mainstream media, are underpinned by an ambition to symbolically position refugees as passive victims and to direct viewers to respond through actions (e.g., monetary donations). However, a limited condition is inherent in the photographic representation—mainly when depicting human suffering—since "no medium can communicate the trauma that is known only to direct experience" (Hariman & Lucaites, 2016, p. 84). In a fraction of a second, a refugee woman pictured in a photographic scene is disconnected from her life-world experience and reduced to a mere representation of 'the refugee,' providing a face for a catastrophic event. Therefore, this paper aims to provide a historical overview of the traditional migrant image and complicate that by exploring alternative projects that articulate migrant women's political agency within the visual representation realm.

Over the past 20 years, photographs such as *Crying Girl on the Border* by John Moore, *Exodus* by Nicolò Filippo Rosso, *and Hope for a New Life* by Warren Richardson were celebrated and legitimized through Western news organizations and awarded in World Press Photo contests. These images follow certain humanitarian traditions while portraying migration experiences. Given the politics of representing distant suffering and the migrant transitory nature, I divide this essay into three topics. First, I address the three main periods of the history of humanitarian communication that influenced the construction of a victim-oriented narrative and the shifts in 'the refugee' status. Second, I explore the spectacle of distant suffering by focusing on moral spectatorship, the visual elements of suffering's depictions, and aesthetic appeals (grand emotions and low-intensity emotions) that can lead to action or undermine it. Finally, I reflect on photography as a politically and morally charged terrain full of controversies among moral spectators, victims, photographers, institutions, and tensions between representing migration experiences objectively and subjectively. I briefly examine Sarah Cooper and Nina Gorfer's series of portraits of women affected by the refugee crisis called *Between These Folded Walls, Utopia* (2017-2020- Fotografiska)". Considering the historical tradition of framing refugees as de-politicized subjects, I conclude that Cooper and Gorfer's project creatively contests and reinvents documentary practices, framing refugee women in a space of political resistance.

Early Images of Suffering and Shifts in 'The Refugee' Status

Theories related to a postcolonial perspective, which explore concepts such as subalternity, process othering, visuality, countervisuality, and hybridity, inform critical studies about humanitarian communication (Bhabha, 2012; Mirzoeff, 2011; Spivak, 1999; Said, 1979). Taking into account the imbalance and inequality of power, the interdependence, and the mutual construction of subjectivities in the relationship between colonizer and colonized, Bhabha (2012) asserts that hybridity is more than a cross-cultural exchange. It is an ongoing negotiation of social differences in which colonial authority is reproduced— a process he terms mimicry—subverting colonized societies to imperial discourse (Bhabha, 2012). Within these complex relations between colonial identities, cultural differences, and mimicry, the notion of the stereotype manifests. The stereotype is defined by Said's conception of Orientalism as a repository of imaginative desires and a visual reminder of colonized inferiority. This notion of colonized inferiority is tied to Spivak's (1999) concept- the metaphor of the subalternity, which is defined as a structured place from which the capacity to access power is obstructed. Spivak critically examines the process of consolidating Others as subalterns. The author focuses on the representations available by those who partially escaped the silence of subalternity and were misread for much of their life (Spivak, 1999). For instance, considering historians' writings, Spivak (1999) asserts that it is a myth that subalterns can speak because they are no more than a mere representation on the pages of history.

Complementing this theoretical framework within a postcolonial perspective, Mirzoeff (2011) contributes to this literature by investigating the inherent instability of dominant visuality— European visual cultural superiority—through the exploration of *countervisualities*; In response to the imperial complex, groups that lack political recognition create spaces in which voices of Others (subalterns) can be articulated and dispute over what is visible (Mirzoeff, 2011). Therefore, the theories mentioned offer the foundation for scholars to examine further how humanitarian photography reproduces the power imbalances it purports to criticize and to discuss how visual narratives can negotiate and resist stereotypical representations of migrants.

Humanitarian communication scholarship pays close attention to the role played by visual representation in mediating the relationship between distant suffering and the moral spectator and creating a stereotypical figure of victims (Bleiker, 2018; Chouliaraki, 2013; Mortensen & Trenz, 2016; Wright, 2002). Hutchison and Bleiker (2012) suggest that humanitarian representation promotes a colonial understanding of subalterns, delineates their suffering, "construct[s] victims

as pitiable objects of sympathy and encourages audiences to engage with the disaster through an emotional lens" (p. 185). As the history of humanitarian representation is broad, I draw on the literature that predominantly debates the construction of traditional visual representations of refugees (Hutchison & Bleiker, 2012; Gatrell, 2013; Johnson, 2011). Based on these studies, I highlight three key periods—The Anti-Slavery Movement (1783-1888), the Wars Period (the Holocaust, World War II, and the Cold War), and the Decolonization of Africa and Asia (1945-1960)—in which the victim-oriented narrative and 'the refugee' status took shape.

First Period: Anti-Slavery Movement and Early Visual Representation of Suffering

The early visual representation of suffering and the victim-oriented narratives have roots in the abolitionist movement from the mid-eighteenth century. Leaders of the abolitionist movement framed their speeches by recounting histories of enslaved people's horrific suffering (Sliwinski, 2011). For example, William Wilberforce, a British politician, in his performance in the British Parliament, described a story of a "single girl mortally beaten by the captain of her slave ship for allegedly refusing to 'dance' on the ship's deck" (Sliwinski, 2011, p. 1-2). A few days after Wilberforce's performance, the story gained a hand-coloured print and was widely circulated in the British press.[4] This example illustrates how caricatures and cartoons shared in the press during the anti-slavery movement played a central role in conveying information about the suffering of enslaved people and cultivating "sympathetic sentiments in viewers, consequently, humanitarian meanings and actions" (Hutchison & Bleiker, 2012, p. 180).

The visual dynamics that guided the representation of enslaved people introduced a particular type of humanitarian agency that distances the viewer and the subject depicted by constructing a victim-oriented narrative (Hutchison & Bleiker, 2012). In this narrative, enslaved people are portrayed as "powerless, devoid of agency even when presented in an obvious position of resistance" (Hutchison & Bleiker, 2012, p. 181). Enslaved people are represented as passive, primitive, helpless, and silent, experiencing cruelty, especially enslaved women. According to

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[4] Punishment Aboard a Slave Ship Image (1792):
http://www.slaveryimages.org/s/slaveryimages/item/2040/mirador (Accessed on Jun 9, 2022)

Hutchison and Bleiker (2012), enslaved women were depicted naked, resulting in an erotic and voyeuristic image. These images place enslaved women as sexualized objects of contemplation. Afterward, the representation of refugee women was constructed under the same visual frames (Bleiker & Hutchison, 2018; Dogra, 2011; Elshatian, 1987; Shepherd, 2012).

This early period of visually portraying suffering was influential in raising awareness and discussions around cruelty, consequently featuring stereotypes of victimhood (Hutchison & Bleiker, 2012). These stereotypes of victimhood were replicated in different ways in the following two periods as the status of 'the refugee' shifted during the Holocaust, World War II, the Cold War and the decolonization process.

Second Period: Visual Representation of European Refugees

According to Wilson and Brown (2009), early humanitarian institutions relied on religious doctrines such as Judaism, Christianity, and Islam to justify assisting others in need. These religious narratives encourage the act of alleviating suffering based on charity and the idea that in the face of God, everyone is equal. Imperialist expansion, colonialism, and missionary expeditions in Western colonies were also "justified on humanitarian grounds" (Hutchisom & Bleiker, 2012, p. 183). Later on, some secular institutions arose following universalism principles and transcending boundaries such as "race, class, religion, gender, and nation" (Wilson and Brown, 2009, p. 3). For instance, in 1863, the International Committee for the Relief of the Wounded, known today as the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC or Red Cross), was founded to assist injured soldiers who were victims of war battles.

Red Cross introduced the humanitarian principles that guided the humanitarian intervention until the 1990s. According to Chandler (2001), the four humanitarian principles were: *humanity* (the desire to assist suffering without discrimination); *impartiality* (the desire to assist without discrimination except on the basis of needs by giving priority to the most urgent case of distress); *neutrality* (the desire to assist without taking sides engaging in political controversies); and *universality* (desire to assist any place following shared universal humanitarian values). Red Cross designed these principles to separate humanitarian actions from the political sphere (Chandler, 2001).

The 'apolitical' approach that humanitarian action seems to rely on is one of the key features distinguishing humanitarian intervention and human rights advocacy (Wilson & Brown, 2009). In 1949, the Human Rights Declaration was instituted during the Geneva Convention. In this period, the visual representation of

human trauma—especially the mass circulation of photographs that depicted the horrors of the Nazi concentration camps— served as witness documents for viewers to judge the crimes against humanity occurring to distant Others and indicated the necessity of a legal document to guarantee human rights (Ristovska, 2021; Sliwinski, 2011).

According to Wilson and Brown (2009), both human rights and humanitarianism reject the idea that suffering is acceptable. However, while human rights advocacy considers legal claims, humanitarianism does not operate in the legal realm. Humanitarianism seeks to assist vulnerable people and alleviate their suffering but "does not necessarily act to defend violated rights" (Wilson & Brown, 2009, p. 11). Another important distinction between humanitarianism and human rights is the notion of agency. When claiming their human rights, it is assumed that individuals do so through self-directed actions, while beneficiaries of humanitarian aid are passive recipients (Wilson & Brown, 2009). The humanitarian visual representations are committed to translating this idea of passive recipients/victims waiting for humanitarian assistance (Bleiker, 2018; Bleiker & Hutchison, 2019; Chouliariaki, 2010, 2013).

Therefore, considering this distinction between human rights and humanitarianism, the term humanitarian was widely employed to refer to actions— under the neutrality principle— that mitigate the civilian consequences of war (Calhoun, 2008). The Holocaust and the Second World War led millions of people to be displaced and forced to migrate. In 1950, Western states' response to the European migration problem was the foundation of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR). According to Gatrell (2013), this international institution intended to provide international refugee protection, manage humanitarian funding from voluntary donations, and seek a permanent solution to the refugee problem. UNHCR was responsible for supervising the application of the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, which defines a refugee as "someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion" (UNHCR, 1951, p. 3). The definition of refugee status and asylum policies is Eurocentric, as UNHCR's first operation was with the European population within European territories (Gatrell, 2013; Johnson, 2011).

Johnson (2011) examines the historical portrayals of refugees in the UNHCR photo archives. She describes that the first visual materials depicted families of refugees and individuals in a manner reminiscent of the industrialized world. This is discernible through visual elements indicative of a Western identity, such as clothing

styles that suggest specific class and cultural background. [5] In this period, the typical representation of refugees were white male, heroic, and anti-communist citizens who fled due to political persecution. Johnson (2011) mentions that there is little evidence of refugees framed as depoliticized victims during that period.

During the Cold War, refugees acquired an ideological value, and their image was used for strategic purposes of propaganda (Johnson, 2011). According to Johnson (2011), both capitalist and communist parties used the visual representation of refugees as an argument that policies and politics of the 'other side' were causing displacement. However, the consequences of the Decolonization of Africa and Asia (1945-1960) brought public attention to forced migration from these two continents. The popular image of the refugee shifted from a white European individual with a political agency to a "nameless flood of poverty-stricken women and children fleeing due to violence and war" (Johnson, 2011, p. 1022). Depictions of refugees in masses and refugee women with a child were embodied in the visual imagery of "Third World" refugees.

Third Period: The Traditional Visual Representation of "Third World" Refugees

"Third World" refugees differed from those envisaged by the UN Refugee Convention. Thus, the policies and approaches designed to respond to the European migration problem were no longer applicable to Global South refugees. Instead of dealing with individual refugees, UNHCR started to deal with mass flows of refugees (Johnson, 2011). 1970s images from UNHCR photo archives are characterized by masses, overcrowded boats full of people, and women and children (Johnson, 2011; Bleiker et al., 2013).6 In this third period, the visual representation of refugees and the Western posture changed regardless of the refugee crisis problem (Bauman,

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[5] Photograph of an Austrian family from UNHCR (1958) https://media.unhcr.org/asset-management/2CZ9LOVC2XC?WS=SearchResults; (Accessed Jun 7, 2022)

[6] Photographs: Democratic Republic of Congo. Refugees from Rwanda (1961) https://media.unhcr.org/asset-management/2CZ9LOQ1G765?WS=SearchResults / Morocco. Camp life for Algerian refugees (1960) https://media.unhcr.org/asset-management/2CZ9LOKZTIW?WS=SearchResults (Accessed Jun 7, 2022)

2016; Gatrell, 2013). Western states began to implement restrictive asylum policies while NGOs engaged in developing long-term interventionist projects.

In the 1990s, the 'new humanitarianism' emerged in response to the refugee crisis, changing the principles established by the Red Cross (Chandler, 2001; Calhoun, 2008). Problems like famine, natural disasters, local conflicts, and diseases shifted NGOs' approach from emergency humanitarian aid to long-term developmentalism (Chandler, 2001). To maintain their non-political status, NGOs justified their actions "through the language of morals and ethics rather than politics" (Calhoun, 2008, p. 682). Due to this new humanitarian approach, NGOs incorporated new visual patterns in their representation, for example, depicting refugee women working in development projects (Dogra, 2011). These depictions do not represent refugees as passive victims but end up placing women as "agents of development and ideal neoliberal vehicle for investment" (Bleiker, 2018, p. 26). The positive appeal will shortly be problematized.

Humanitarian crises are not the product of a single factor but an interaction between natural disasters, armed conflicts, diseases, and other human vulnerabilities (Ribeiro, 2018). For this reason, the early Convention on Refugee Status embraced refugees fleeing from persecution but lacked specific policies for different scenarios of displacement (Gatrell, 2013). Also, after the 9/11 attacks, emerged an idea that "Third World" refugees were not fleeing from causes of disasters or persecution but making "informed and beneficial migration choices" (Johnson, 2011, p. 1027). This idea increased fear and others' sentiments; as Bauman (2016) mentions, the mass of homeless migrants raises moral panic, xenophobia, and racism in Western society. It also creates physical and symbolic walls between 'them' and 'us' (Said, 1979). Male refugee figures started to be used to represent 'threats' and 'evil-doing' (Chouliariaki & Stolic, 2017).

In examining the traditional representation of refugees and building connections with specific events over history, scholars identify the shift in the imagination of the refugee and how it has been shaped by Euro-American socio-visual imagery (Bleiker, 2018; Chouliariaki & Stolic, 2017; Johnson, 2011). In particular, Johnson (2011) classifies three concurrent shifts in the imagination of the refugee over time. First, *racialization* is a shift of the global refugee regime from Eurocentric to the Global South. Second, *victimization* is a shift from the refugee as a powerful political figure to an undifferentiated victim, voiceless and without political agency. Third, *feminization* is a shift from an imagined figure from a man as heroic to a woman without political agency. These three overlapping patterns operated within a discourse of depoliticization, "denying the figure of the refugee the capacity for the

political agency" (Johnson, 2011, p. 1015). Additionally, the 'Third World Refugee' status is a homogenized social category that strips individuals of their singularities and reinforces the binary opposition between 'First World' and 'Third World' (Dogra, 2011). Refugees' representation as depoliticized victims is a key piece for the spectacle of *distant suffering*.

The Spectacle of Distant Suffering

Humanitarian communication has its roots in Western politics, particularly Western conception of welfare that associates action towards distant suffering not through justice but with pity (Boltanski, 1999; Chouliaraki, 2010). Due to this attempt to promote pity—the hope that pity might lead to compassion and commitment—humanitarian communication is both rhetorical and performative (Boltanski, 1999; Chouliaraki, 2013). Chouliaraki (2013) states that humanitarianism was founded on a "theatrical arrangement that separates safe spectators from vulnerable others and communicates its moral message through the staging [images] of spectacles of suffering" (p. 87). Within this spectacle, viewers are invited to engage in performances through action at a distance (Boltanski, 1999; Mortensen & Trenz, 2016). Drawing on these critical studies, this topic explores the key terms, ideas, and problematics of the spectacle of distant suffering.

Moral Spectatorship

In investigating the spectacle of distant suffering, scholars complicate the role played by media in mediating the relationship between the viewer—the *moral spectator*—and the distant sufferer— a person suffering a thousand miles away (Boltanski, 1999; Chouliaraki, 2013; Mortensen & Trenz, 2016). For example, humanitarian photographs shared by NGO campaigns mediate this relationship by narrowing boundaries and making the distant refugee child seem "as close as the one who lives next door" (Bogre, 2020, p. 379). These images are composed to make the audience feel for and respond to those in need, creating moral bonds between spectators (Chouliaraki, 2013; Mortensen & Trenz, 2016). Mortensen and Trenz (2016) explain that the public of *moral spectatorship* is not "bound together by pre-existing ties of the community such as the nation-state, but rather by shared attention to mediated reports of distant suffering and collective search for adequate ways to commit" (p. 345). The *politics of pity* guide the individual or collective commitment towards distant suffering.

Unlike justice, a shared understanding of fairness, pity does not question "whether the misery of the unfortunate is justified" due to the urgency to act (Boltanski, 1999, p. 5). Immediate action is needed to end suffering (Boltanski, 1999; Chouliaraki, 2010). This urgency in making moral spectators engage in efforts to alleviate the pain of distant sufferers also differentiates pity from *compassion*. As Boltanski (1999) mentions, compassion is directed toward particular individuals, whereas pity "generalizes in order to deal with distance, and in order to generalize becomes eloquent, recognizing and discovering itself as emotion and feeling" (p. 6). The politics of pity reinforce the asymmetry between spectators and sufferers (safe spectators and vulnerable others). Due to the discourse of urgency in alleviating the suffering in which the politics of pity operate, the staging of the spectacle of suffering—mediated through images—needs to translate the message in a compelling way to the spectators.

Binder and Jaworsky (2018) consider that "images that relocate 'distant suffering' in the experiential proximity of the spectator are more effective than images in which the victim remains exotic and far away" (p. 6). The photograph of Alan Kurdi, a 3-year-old Syrian boy lying face down and dead on a Turkish beach, is an example of an image that increased concerns regarding the crisis in Syria as well as monetary donations to NGOs (Binder & Jaworsky, 2018). Scholars attribute the 'successful' commitment to action to several factors, including Alan Kurdi's white skin and Western clothing, which made it easier for Western spectators to view him "as a representative victim" as could have been their child (Mortensen & Trenz, 2016, p. 354). Therefore, to convey a simple, direct, and convincing message, humanitarian photography foregrounds particular visual elements, themes, and compositions explored in the next topic.

Depictions of Distant Suffering: Visual Elements of Refugees' Photographs

Kurasawa (2015), Wright (2002), Bleiker and Hutchison (2019), and Bleiker et al. (2013) studies present the visual elements, archetypes, and compositions of humanitarian photography that portray distant suffering. Based on these authors' categorization of types of photographs of suffering, I organize the representation of refugees in three main visual frames: (1) images of one individual or small group, (2) images of masses of refugees, and (3) refugees and aid workers.

Putting Faces to the Statistical Data

This category includes images that frame refugees in close-up shots of single or small groups in a state of unvarnished suffering (e.g., starving, sick, or injured) and/or in transit. Kurasawa (2015) notes that these images personify suffering by foregrounding the "corporeal, psychological, emotional and existential distress" (p. 23) of humanitarian emergency victims.

These image compositions translate elements from Christian religious paintings, which have a long tradition of portraying forced migration, for example, *The Expulsion from the Garden of Eden* and *The Flight into Egypt* (Wright, 2002). In these paintings, couples or families are portrayed in transit with few belongings and a means of transport (Wright, 2002). Also, from Christian iconography, the *Fall of a Man* stereotype features an individual or small group in a "state of degradation, isolation, and nakedness" (Wright, 2002, p. 57) and the *Madonna and Child* image is one of the most common ways to portray refugee women and child as symbols of distress (Bleiker & Hutchison, 2019). Examples: *Algerian Refugee (1960)*, *Hungry Rohingya Children (1968),* and *Somalia (2011).*[7]

Massification of Refugees' Bodies

In this category, photographs depict refugees as undifferentiated corporeal mass, that is "shots of corpses or survivors piled up against, or in close proximity to, one another in the frame" (Kurasawa, 2015, p. 24). In contrast to the previous category that provides a face for the statistical data, these photographic images function as a "metonym encapsulating the quantitative magnitude of a humanitarian crisis by pointing to the vast numbers of persons affected by it" (Kurasawa, 2015, p. 24). Some of these images do not have recognizable facial features, signifying a threat to sovereignty and security (Bleiker et al., 2013). Historical archetypes that provide a

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[7] Photographs: Tanzania. Refugees from Mozambique (1968) https://media.unhcr.org/asset-management/2CZ9LOQ1GTP7?WS=SearchResults/ Bangladesh. Food distribution for hungry Rohingya children (2017) https://media.unhcr.org/asset-management/2CZ7A2AYIFXL?WS=SearchResults/ Somalia Women and Child (2011) https://media.unhcr.org/asset-management/2CZ9LOQMC3_G?WS=SearchResults (Accessed Jun 9, 2022).

repertoire for this composition are the *Exodus* and Francisco Goya's *Disasters of War* (Wright, 2002). Examples: *Afghan Refugees (1984)* and *Hong Kong Refugees (1963).*[8]

NGOs Visibility: Heroes and Victims in Emergencies and Long-term Programs

This category includes two types of images: (1) emergency rescue and (2) long-term care (Kurasawa, 2015). Both types include scenes involving staff from humanitarian aid agencies or celebrities attempting to save the lives of victims of humanitarian emergencies or engaging in long-term development programs. The composition of the images conveys the relationship between the rescuer or aid worker (who possesses agency) and the victim (who is helpless) (Kurasawa, 2015; Wright, 2002). According to Kurasawa (2015), even if the rescuer is not pictured, the NGO logo or other elements such as donated clothing, medicine, and food rations are part of the image composition. These elements identify that the victim is receiving humanitarian aid and, consequently, promote NGO actions (NGO visibility).

Photographs that portray emergency rescue situations follow the same line as François-Auguste's depictions of the announcement of the slavery abolition by French officials (Kurasawa, 2015). Most of the images depict male aid workers rescuing victims. Photographs that picture long-term care activities frame female aid workers and refugees in hospitals, orphanages, and refugee camps. According to Kurasawa (2015), a historical symbol of care is the visual arts of *La Pietà*. Examples of NGO visibility are *Hygiene Kit Distribution (2018)*, *Ben Stiller Ambassador (2019)*, and *Hospital and Children (2021).* [9]

In addition to the visual elements, another component of the depictions of distant suffering is their appeal—grand or low-intensity emotions— which aim to lead moral spectators to action but can also undermine it.

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[8] Pakistan. Afghan Refugees (1984) https://media.unhcr.org/asset-management/2CZ9LO75NJK?WS=SearchResults / Hong Kong (1963) https://media.unhcr.org/asset-management/2CZ9LO2WR58?WS=SearchResults (Accessed Jun 9 2022).

[9] Bangladesh UNHCR Hygiene Kit Distribution (2018) https://media.unhcr.org/asset-management/2CZ7A2HL9L9L / Lebanon. Ambassador Ben Stiller meets Syrian Refugee (2019) https://media.unhcr.org/asset-management/2CZ7A2R5IP71?WS=SearchResults / Afghanistan. Hospitals treat malnourished children (2021) https://media.unhcr.org/asset-management/2CZ9LO67L8E9?WS=SearchResults (Accessed Jun 7, 2022)

Aesthetics Appeals

Appeal Through Grand Emotion: Negative and Positive Imagery

1. Negative/Shock Appeal

Oxfam 1956 and Red Cross 1961 campaigns are examples of negative representations of suffering. These campaigns' victim-oriented narrative focuses on the distant suffering as an object of Western contemplation, disempowering the victims depicted and bringing forth the colonial gaze (Chouliariaki, 2010). The shock appeal urges that "failure to act is a failure to acknowledge our [moral spectator] historical and personal participation in perpetuating human suffering" (Chouliariaki, 2010, p. 111). By placing moral spectators as part of this Western legacy and responsible for reproducing power relations, the shock appeal seeks to evoke pity, guilt, shame, and indignation by turning grand emotions into actions. Scholars denounce this appeal for dehumanizing suffering as it aesthetically foregrounds violent scenes, such as depictions of misery, hunger, disease, and death (Chouliaraki, 2013; Hutchosion, Bleiker & Campbell, 2014).

2. Positive Appeal

The positive appeal rejects the imagery of the sufferer as a victim and focuses on the victim's agency and dignity. In contrast to the previous appeal that implies a persecutor, the positive appeal tries to evoke empathy, gratitude, and the presence of a benefactor (aid worker or donor). This appeal singularizes donors by addressing each one as someone who makes a "concrete contribution to improving a sufferer's life" (Chouliaraki, 2010, p. 112). This style personalizes suffering by proposing a narrative beyond victims as passive and placing them as actors. However, as Chouliaraki (2010) mentions, this appeal seems to empower distant suffers through discourses of dignity and self-determination but ends up "simultaneously disempowers them by appropriating their otherness in Western discourses of identity and agency" (p. 113). Scholars describe this appeal as glossing over the misery of suffering behind the image of a grateful sufferer (Bleiker, 2018; Chouliaraki, 2010; Dogra, 2011).

Grand emotional appeals, such as the aesthetics of shock or positive imagery, can also induce moral spectators' resistance to take action.

3. Resistance to Grand Emotion Appeals

Chouliaraki (2013) asserts that negative and positive appeals—through shock effect and positive imagery—can generate a popular resistance known as *compassion*

fatigue ('I've seen this before syndrome') reflected in two more pragmatic risks: the 'bystander' effect[10] and the 'boomerang' effect[11]. These effects result in a popular aversion to images that, according to Chouliariaki (2013), rather than facilitating public action on distant suffering, can undermine it.

Sontag (2001) establishes a connection between the compassion fatigue thesis and the photography of atrocities by suggesting that the shock of photographed atrocities just evokes a moral response if it shows something new— a 'negative epiphany'— in the viewer's first encounter with a horrific picture (Campbell, 2014). Campbell argues that Sontag's idea of 'negative epiphany' lacks supporting evidence as it "seems a weak basis on which to make absolute and universal claims about the power of photography" (p. 104).[12]

Campbell (2014) also criticizes Moeller's (1999) understanding of compassion fatigue by stating that her arguments are contradictory and lack support. For Moeller (1999), human suffering becomes mere entertainment, a commodity that appears on TV and newspaper columns that need a visual hook to retain audiences' interest. The sensationalized treatment of distant suffering makes people feel that only extreme and/or stories connected politically, socially or culturally deserve attention (Moeller, 1999). Moeller (1999) addresses compassion fatigue as both a consequence and effect of the circulation of images in media. That is, compassion fatigue can be a *consequence* of the sensationalist way that traditional media cover crises, promoting an aversion to seeing or an *effect* that leads to the absence of images regarding an event that seems too remote and/or not sufficiently connected to Western political, social, and cultural contexts.

Campbell (2014) and Höijer (2004) challenge the idea of compassion fatigue by doubting the existence of a totally fatigued individual. Different types of appeals provoke different reactions in the audience. Hariman and Lucaites (2016) and Azoulay (2010) consider that the shock appeal (aestheticization of the suffering) can

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[10] Bystander' effect: "refers to people's indifference or reluctance to act on suffering as a reaction towards these flows of negative emotion that ultimately leave people feeling that there is nothing they can do" (Chouliaraki, 2013, p. 173)

[11] Boomerang' effect: "refers to people's indignation not towards the imagined evildoer but towards the guilt-tripping message of the 'negative' campaigns themselves – 'for bombarding you with material that only makes you feel miserable and guilty" (Chouliaraki, 2013, p. 173)

[12] Sontag reviews some aspects of her thesis in her later work *Regarding the Pain of Others* (2003).

also provoke reflection about contemporary social problems; photographs of distant suffering can also "serve as a rich source of knowledge about the world and the people appearing in it" (Azoulay, 2010, p. 246). These authors acknowledge a problematic relationship between the viewer, emotional appeals, and compassion, but they urge that it is not generalized and universal fatigue, as Sontag and Moeller suggest.

The compassion fatigue thesis does not fit in the digital scenario where social media have radically changed how a humanitarian crisis is covered and the modes of moral engagement. For example, BBC's reporting on Libya and Syria offered daily live updates on the conflicts by using a multiplatform online structure, where viewers could read, click, navigate, and skim through images (Chouliaraki, 2015). Covering a crisis through a multivocal communicative structure gives space to the citizen's voice—digital witnessing—who engages and creates content regarding distant suffering, competing with professional agencies for more visibility on networks[13] (Chouliariaki, 2015). This digital scenario provided NGOs with other aesthetic possibilities to represent suffering, such as through a low-intensity emotional appeal.

Low-intensity Emotional Appeal: De-emotionalization of the Cause and the Crisis of Pity

The emergent scenario, called post-humanitarianism, is characterized by the *crisis of pity*, which introduces narratives framed in a low-intensity emotional appeal. Chouliariaki (2010), influenced by Boltanski's definition of politics of pity, defines crises of pity as "a consequence of the tactical use of humanitarian argument in the service of political interest that often discredits the appeal to suffering as a universal moral cause" (p. 108). The low-intensity emotional appeal disincorporates the representation of suffering from its discourse by disengaging action through pity. Through the de-emotionalization and particularization of the cause, this appeal does not evoke immediate emotion and implies that actions depend on viewers' personal judgment.

Chouliaraki (2010) calls attention to a few characteristics of the low-intensity emotional appeal. First, the *technologization of action* simplifies the spectator's engagement with the humanitarian cause by clicking under the 'sign petitions' or

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[13] As Chouliariaki (2015) suggests "despite celebrated inclusion of citizen voice in digital platforms, hierarchies of place and human life continue to define who has the right to be heard in these platforms, thereby continuing to classify the world between those who deserve and those who do not deserve protection (p. 118)

'make a donation' link. Second, the narrative framed on the *de-emotionalization* relies on irony, hyperreality, and optical illusion. Third, there is no justification—an *absence of justification*— for why engaging in the specific cause is important. Even though this appeal is disembodied from discourses of morality, it is also debated as it still draws on the resources of the media market—the commodification of the cause— in which humanitarian organization operates (Chouliariaki, 2010). Chouliaraki (2010) cites *No food diet' WFP*, *Amnesty International-The Execution,* and *It's Not Happening Here but Now* as examples of campaigns that disengage action through pity.

Within the spectacle of distant suffering, sufferers are portrayed as de-politicized subjects and dependent upon outside aid; refugees are pictured as helpless victims of a crisis. In this politically and morally charged terrain of humanitarian representation, it is important to look at practices that try to re-assign the subject's agency, for instance, Sarah Cooper and Nina Gorfer's series of portrayals of women affected by the refugee crisis called *Between These Folded Walls, Utopia* (2017-2020-Fotografiska)".

Re-assigning Agency Through Artistic Lens

The project *Between These Folded Walls, Utopia*, started in 2017 in Sweden when European countries were taking refugees from the last wave of migration in 2015. Sarah Cooper and Nina Gorfer invited women whose life stories have been affected by forced migration to partake in their photographic project. The images involve digital collage, physical cutting, pasting, and subsequent re-digitization, resulting in illusionary depictions. The multi-layered portraits are rich in colours and symbols that translate subjective aspects of refugee women's migration experiences. Through visual narratives that distance themselves from photographic realism, the artists articulate these women's life stories, which have roots in multiple cultures. The portrayals aim to create the world these women imagined for themselves, representing the migration experience more than statistics in news columns.

The artists articulate metaphorical elements representing different facets of collective and individual migrant women's experiences, such as hybrid identity, cultural traditions, diversity, womanhood, sense of belonging, home, and dreams. In *A Portray of Jana,* the artists ask Jana about her utopian place, where her heart goes, and where she feels at home. Jana described the landscape of her family's hometown of Nazareth, which she has never been allowed to visit due to passport limitations. Her family fled to Lebanon before she was born. Her utopian place is based on stories her family told her about Nazareth. The visual narrative includes lemons and gardens, representing the region's description and affinity with nature and solitude. *Shadi or*

the Girl with Many Hands (2018) and *Dressing Segal (2018)[14]* are portraits of migrant women that include 'extra' hands without any faces. These additional hands conjure the essence of theatre sets, where actions unfold with individuals assisting behind the curtains. Influenced by their cultural backgrounds and the assistance received during their journey, these women now residing in Sweden articulate the dream of a utopia place they can call home. The idea of supporting each other and exchanging life experiences from their trajectory is also visually depicted in *The Mountain* (2018)[15], as five migrant women come together to form a mountain, symbolizing their shared journey and solidarity.

To analyze these metaphorical narratives, it is essential to consider what lies beyond the shutter operation and its products (photographs). Building on Azoulay's (2008, 2010a) 'new' *political ontology of photography*, I am not preoccupied only with what photographs show but also with how they function in the world. The portrayals depict aspects of migrant women's subjectivity in their migration experiences as a mode of interpretative engagement, inviting viewers to contemplate and engage with the photographs. By listening to these women's life stories and creating metaphorical compositions, the artists engage in a process that does not reduce the image-making to any of its components such as camera, photographer, subject, and spectator (Azoulay, 2008). This approach opens up the space to rethink the co-constitutive of aesthetics and political dimensions in photography. That is, according to Azoulay (2012), it is not the photograph itself that is political, but the space among people within the photographic event that has the potential to become political.

The different ways to interact with photographs and explore their political and aesthetic potential allow artists who embrace subjective narratives to employ photography as a mode of resistance (Demos, 2013). *Between These Folded Walls, Utopia* questions the lack or inappropriate representation of migrant women as passive victims and creatively frames them—a group "stripped bare of political representation" (Demos, 2013, p. 101)— in a space of resistance and politicization. Demos (2013) understands documentation practices as a site of negotiation where the political is reinstituted into an aesthetic framework. The political potential emerges in the relationship between representation and reflexivity, articulating

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[14] Images available: https://www.coopergorfer.com/work/utopia
[15] Image available: https://www.coopergorfer.com/work/utopia

subjects' agency and reinventing artistic possibilities of political engagement (Demos, 2013; Rancière, 2009).

Between These Folded Walls, Utopia shifts the grammar of the sensible to represent the migration experience and to advocate through an artistic lens, blurring lines between reality and fiction. The images distance themselves from humanitarian conventions that portray the reality of suffering and fragment the representational framework of migration by engaging with a more allegorical language to reflect on lives committed to mobility. These images also express feminist aesthetics and have a political force (carry political meaning), placing women in the picture as narrators of their experiences. In summary, Sarah Cooper and Nina Gorfer's visual narratives rearrange the political into the aesthetic framework, moving beyond traditional documentation codes of objectivity and realism, producing meaning about the subjective aspects of the migration experience, and re-assigning agency to refugee women within the representation realm.

Conclusions

To conclude, as addressed throughout this paper, photography can be used to either reinforce prejudiced stereotypes or contest them. On the one side, by following specific visual conventions and aesthetic appeals, refugee depictions provide a face for significant catastrophic events (Calhoun, 2008; Bleiker & Hutchison, 2019). In particular, "women are thought to provide a humanizing face for what is often large-scale, distant and de-humanizing disaster" (Bleiker & Hutchison, 2019, p. 235). Women are considered ideal disaster victims and international humanitarian symbols (Bleiker & Hutchison, 2019; Dogra, 2011; Shepherd, 2012). On the other side, the different ways to interact with photography and explore its political and aesthetic potential allow groups overlooked throughout history to use photography to subvert traditional and oppressive representations.

Between these folded walls, Utopia's visual narratives, like many other projects that engage in practices distant from humanitarian traditions, shift from the photographer's and the photographed's vertical and binary position to a more horizontal and dialogical approach. This approach creates a space within the photographic act and in other moments of engagement with the images that allow participation within the narrative. That is, photography is a space of negotiation in which narratives can subvert traditional migrant images and articulate subjective aspects of migration experiences. It is within this space that the political and aesthetic features are co-constitutive. This initial exploration into how artistic approaches to photography can transform migrants from passive victims to politicized subjects

marks just the beginning of a broader dialogue on agency, migrant women's subjective experiences, and photographic practices. These topics warrant greater attention within critical media scholarship as plural aesthetics forms of visual narratives can mediate refugee women's processes of belonging to a new place, re-signifying their identities, memories, and what they now call 'home.'

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Beyond Brand

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Abstract:
In late October 2021, Facebook rebranded to Meta Platforms Inc. This reinvention rooted in Silicon Valley idealizations of rebranding and utopic associations of perpetual progress, however, exists in contrast to Founder and CEO Mark Zuckerberg's likening of Facebook to basic infrastructure—i.e., electricity and chairs—and his purported disinterest in 'coolness'. Through an exploration of infrastructure, brand, and rebranding as it relates to Facebook (now Meta Platforms Inc.), this article seeks to examine the resulting paradox these contrasting concepts present, leveraging brand, image, and associations versus "boring", transparent infrastructure.

Keywords:
Facebook; Meta Platforms Inc.; infrastructure; brand; rebrand; paradox.

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In a 2013 interview with *The Atlantic*, Facebook's Founder and CEO, Mark Zuckerberg, likened Facebook to electricity—i.e., a basic infrastructural utility (Bucher, 2021, p. 57), stating that he is unconcerned with the global information communication technology's (ICT) maintenance of 'coolness', explaining "that it was never his intention for Facebook to be cool" (Bucher, 2021, p. 57). Since infrastructure and coolness are inherently mutually exclusive, how can Facebook endeavour to function as infrastructure, supposedly disinterested in being cool, yet also undergo such a significant and highly publicized organizational rebrand; a rebrand clearly indicative of concern for brand, image, and associations, in other words, 'coolness'?

The contrast between infrastructure and 'coolness' creates a precarious paradox for Zuckerberg. With the understanding that infrastructure is a relational concept, this paper seeks to examine the paradox Zuckerberg has created for himself: (1) striving to create a basic utility regarded as infrastructure by its users/consumers, while (2) rebranding to Meta Platforms Inc. With basic utilities and coolness being mutually exclusive concepts, Facebook's clear obsession with its public-facing brand (image, identity, and associations) suggests the virtual social platform does not yet function as infrastructure—it is still highly visible in the public realm.

Taina Bucher's critical media research on Facebook, Susan Leigh Star's work on infrastructure, and Celia Lury's study of brand will be instrumental in examining Zuckerberg's positioning of Facebook as infrastructural. This paradox (of operating as infrastructure versus concern for brand image) will be explored in depth through the following three sections: (1) infrastructure, (2) brand and rebranding, and (3) Facebook's rebrand and its effects on Facebook as infrastructure.

Beginning with Taina Bucher's proposition that "proclaiming Facebook as a basic utility does not necessarily make it such" (2021, p. 58), she suggests: "Rather we must think of the infrastructural claim as partly a fantasy with real social stakes" (2021, p. 58). These "real social stakes" allude to the paradox of positing Facebook as infrastructure and the resulting challenges the global ICT regularly confronts.

Based on current communication scholarship, it is obvious Facebook is not (yet) regarded by society as a basic utility. This exploratory paper will, nevertheless, consider Zuckerberg's positing of Facebook as infrastructural. Such an examination will present evidence for the paradox Zuckerberg/Facebook has unintentionally created: rebranding to advance the agenda of a highly filtered and curated social construction, founded and thriving on Silicon Valley notions of advancement and perpetual progress, while simultaneously claiming contradictory infrastructural properties (Star, 2002).

Part I: Facebook as Infrastructure

What is infrastructure? Infrastructure as a relational concept

Infrastructure has morphed into a buzzword over the last decade, evermore important due to its increasing significance within media communications. But taken at face value, in an academic context, what does "infrastructure" mean? Citing Susan Leigh Star's "pioneering" (Bucher, 2021, p. 58) work on infrastructure, one can first consider her popular reference to infrastructure as "boring". Characteristics forming this "boring" classification include the "low profile" (Star, 2002, p. 108), detailed, specific, and technical specifications of infrastructure. For whom is infrastructure "boring"? Infrastructure is the basic, fundamental structures and processes that contain, connect, and maintain phenomena; boring perhaps to those who take it for granted, given the relationality of the concept. In the case of Facebook, for example, the ICT is taken for granted by many—by its international user, consumer, and producer base—it is embedded in their everyday. The minutiae of Facebook and the complex global system of virtual infrastructure it has constructed may very well appear boring and mundane to the average user; the depth of the social fabric is arguably unknown to and/or dismissed by its mass user base. For the thousands of millions of members Facebook has amassed, they understandably view the virtual social networking platform as fundamental—i.e., basic and essential—a part of daily life. This paper's guiding question resurfaces here, with an opportunity for reiteration: although fundamental, and a now-normalized element of the everyday, can Facebook truly be characterized as "infrastructure"? Indeed, the ICT ongoingly carries out innumerable tasks and connections, like electricity, but is Facebook "boring", as Star (2002) claims infrastructure to be? True infrastructure and its intricacies are invisible—"something that is just there, ready-to-hand, completely transparent" (Star, 1996, p. 112).

Acknowledging the inherently "boring" nature of infrastructure is a technique Star uses to surface the underlying and mundane operating systems civilization relies on. Although the label "boring" has the potential to be interpreted as unsophisticated and could risk devaluing the infrastructure being described as such, Facebook, for example, yearns to be regarded as "boring"—signaling its ability to be classified as infrastructural—operating transparently.

In further defining infrastructure, Star, in her 2002 article "Infrastructure and ethnographic practice: Working on the fringes", references her earlier (1996) work with Karen Ruhleder in which they present nine properties of infrastructure:

[1] that which is embedded; [2] transparent; [3] having reach or scope; [4] is learned as part of membership; [5] has links with conventions of practice; [6] embodies standards; [7] is built on an installed base (and its inertia); [8] becomes visible upon breakdown; and [9] is fixed in modular increments, not centrally or from an overview.

(Star, 2002, p. 117)

It is through these nine dimensions that Zuckerberg's claim of Facebook as infrastructural can be unpacked in greater detail—investigating the ways in which the virtual social networking platform has become operationally integrated into daily life, and the areas wherein further development is required to achieve true "infrastructural" classification. Exploring select properties more closely: infrastructure, being "embedded", refers to its interwovenness in various knowledge domains across everyday life—demonstrating that infrastructure does not function independently, but rather within a larger, integrated system. In other words, there is a variety of knowledge domains that rely on a given form of infrastructure. As aforementioned, referring to Zuckerberg's analogy of Facebook to electric light (electricity), the embeddedness of infrastructure becomes instantly evident— electricity is ingrained within the everyday—modern society relies on it. When this infrastructure experiences a glitch or malfunction, its presence becomes instantly present. This property also arguably holds true in the case of Facebook; the embeddedness of the virtual platform in the everyday is indisputable, increasingly visible when experiencing a temporary outage. However, its standard operating transparency is questionable, which leads into Star's second property of infrastructure: transparency.

The transparent dimension of infrastructure can be linked to philosopher Martin Heidegger's ready-to-hand theory—"[i]t is something that is just there" (Star, 1996, p. 112); it is invisible. This can be rationalized with electricity—one does not "see" it sustaining daily life, nevertheless, it is undeniably "there". When an unexpected power outage occurs, an immediate disconnect is experienced; those without power become hyper aware of electricity and the myriad of basic, daily activities the infrastructure sustains. It is transparent until it breaks down— foreshadowing property eight: "visible upon breakdown" (Star, 2002, p.117), while displaying the interconnectedness of these nine properties of infrastructure. It can be argued that Facebook operates in a similar way. However, here, one must critically consider its transparency—is the global ICT as "invisible" as electricity? Surely increasingly visible upon breakdown, however the virtual infrastructure does not (yet) function transparently. Facebook's presence and our usage and reliance on the social platform may very easily be overlooked by the average user/consumer, insofar

as Facebook has become a normalized element of daily life. But, Facebook is still "visible" within the everyday; it thrives above the threshold of awareness. It is knowingly present. This adds to the paradox of Facebook as infrastructural. Facebook is, undeniably, deeply and fundamentally ingrained within society, however the virtual social network is not (yet) woven into the fabric of the everyday life to the extent where it operates unknowingly and transparently, like electricity and/or chairs. Although not yet analogous to infrastructure, both the fragility of and societal hyper-dependency on infrastructure *and* Facebook are illustrated here.

Star suggests infrastructure "is learned as part of membership" (2002, p. 117). In saying this, she presents a vital property of infrastructure. "Learned as part of membership" refers to one's participation and degree of involvement with the given infrastructure. The social constructedness of infrastructure is also prevalent here, i.e., there are socially constructed ways in which to engage with different forms of infrastructure; with one's infrastructural "membership" indicating knowledge and participation. As a member of a given community, e.g., a Facebook user, through regular engagement with the social infrastructure "as part of membership", the 'appropriate' (i.e., socially constructed) ways in which to use the infrastructure are learned. These infrastructural basics are often taken for granted—becoming transparent to the user ("member") over time, through experience, "as part of membership". Here, the "boring" element of infrastructure can be further contextualized. Not only does this property of membership demonstrate the relationality of infrastructure, it also contributes to the rendering of Facebook as infrastructural.

With the understanding that infrastructure is relational, when there is breakdown, it is not obvious or transparent to all users. Visibility upon breakdown of a knowledge domain-based infrastructure is contextual—dependent on one's relation (i.e., membership) to the knowledge domain. As Star famously said: "One person's infrastructure is another's brick wall, or in some cases, one person's brick wall is another's object of demolition" (2002, p. 116)—again underscoring the fundamental relationality of infrastructure. Progressing through Star's and Ruhleder's list, the relationality, interrelatedness, and repetitiveness of the properties becomes increasingly apparent. Properties five and six: "links with conventions of practice; [and] embodies standards" (Star, 2002, p. 117) are again suggestive of the social constructedness of infrastructure, and a perceived 'right' and 'wrong' way of engaging with the basic utility and participating in the given knowledge domain.

In essence, Star presents infrastructure as a relation rather than a thing, as a social category, a knowledge domain, and a social construction. As demonstrated above, these fundamental properties of infrastructure set forth by Star can be extended to examining Zuckerberg's proposition of Facebook as infrastructural.

Facebook = Infrastructure

In line with Zuckerberg's situating of Facebook as a form of infrastructure, Taina Bucher, in her 2021 book *Facebook*, suggests it is "something ubiquitous and widely shared, a platform for others to build upon, across time and space" (p. 58). Building on the foundational, property-based conception of infrastructure set forth by Star and Ruhleder, highlighted above via a selective approach in an effort to effectively present apparent parallels, there are many ways by which Facebook fits the working definition of infrastructure; elements of Facebook *have* become infrastructural. Although taken for granted by many, the online social media and social networking platform is certainly not (yet) transparent (a key property of infrastructure); it is perhaps more appropriately "translucent". I suggest this median optic classification insofar as one can undoubtedly grapple with the ways by which Facebook does, arguably, satisfy the properties of infrastructure, but, at the same time however, Facebook is still much more than "boring" invisible infrastructure; in today's hypermediatized society, Facebook is a prevalent virtual social fabric of daily life.

Part II: Brand and Rebranding

What is brand?

Similar to infrastructure, "brand" has become popular rhetoric. Brand is based on sets of relations and the creation of both real and perceived connections. Branding involves meaning making, and the development of linkages and associations. At its core, brand/branding is fixated on creating and maintaining brand image and brand identity, i.e., "*the associations that a brand holds for consumers*" (Lury, 2004, pp. 9-10). The ubiquitous term is tossed around by the masses like a piece of fast fashion; however, its effects and implications are far from temporary.

Celia Lury, in her article "Brand as Assemblage: Assembling culture" (2009), acknowledges the complexity of brand—examining the "implications of describing the brand as an assemblage, and of thinking of branding as a process of assembling

culture" (p. 67). She spotlights the naïveté of viewing brand as a single process—discussing the multidimensionality and convergence involved in brand and brand development. Lury uses the phrase "brand as assemblage" to emphasize the multitude of actors involved in branding, which includes consumers. With this, she suggests "[t]o describe brands as assemblages is, then, at the very least an acknowledgement of the trajectories of diverse practices, technologies and ideas in processes of branding" (Lury, 2009, p. 67). This recognition of the depth of brand is critical in the examination of Facebook's brand and the corporate entity's October 2021 rebranding to Meta Platforms Inc. Such an understanding is equally pertinent in considering Zuckerberg's positioning of Facebook as infrastructural.

The duality of brand—(1) as an assemblage of multiple actors and their respective activities, and (2) as fora for culture assemblage, is evident in the case of Facebook. There are myriad players in the formation and maintenance of Facebook as a brand: users/consumers, producers, advertisers, and stakeholders, to name a few, in addition to the corporate hubs Facebook has established in over 39 countries, on almost every continent (Offices, 2024). Together, these different actors and their corresponding activities form the brand that is Facebook. This brand, however, has morphed considerably since the company's inception in February 2004. Highly complex, like a network of capillaries, these various players contribute to the maintenance and progression of Facebook's brand, brand image, brand identity, and associations. In turn, since early 2004, Facebook has assembled a participatory global culture of its own through its virtual social networking system.

In her article, Lury cautions regarding branding as a "single process" (2009, p. 67), suggesting that in doing so, one neglects the interdependencies and multifactorial nature of "brand development" (2009, p. 67). Facebook's rebranding to Meta Platforms Inc. illuminates this complexity of brand; the corporate entity's strategic rebrand to Meta is the culmination of a number of highly intricate, interrelated processes which impact a variety of brand elements (image, identity, associations, public perception, stakeholder support, etc.); it is not merely a simple, singular, linear process. As noted above, Facebook's rebranding to Meta also inevitably involves its "members". Further here, Lury speaks to the involvement and role of the consumer in the making of a brand. On the receiving end, consumers complete the meaning making process (2009, p. 67). After all, they are the ones deeply involved with the brand on a regular basis. The role of the consumer has grown exponentially with the development and rise of participatory cultures, fueled by social media and the virtual public sphere. Beyond the user/consumer, a brand's positionality and success in the marketplace relies heavily on its recognizability.

Lury expands upon the multidimensionality of brand and branding through three key dimensions: width, depth, and consistency (2009, p. 72). Width refers to the company's product lines, depth is the number of items within each product line, and consistency refers to the relationship between product lines. This triad is organized and managed "through the implementation of brand-names, multi-brand decisions and brand repositioning strategies" (Lury, 2009, p. 72), and can easily be identified within Facebook (now Meta) and the host of subsidiary apps the corporate entity owns including: "Instagram, WhatsApp, Messenger, Oculus, Workplace, Portal, Calibra—and, yes, Facebook" (Rooney, 2019, para. 1).

Recognizing the growth of the prominence of brand in society over the past two decades, "branding as a process of assembling culture" (Lury, 2009, p. 73) becomes ever more evident. Clearly illustrated in the case of Facebook, the birth and development of the brand has been a notable process of assembling a global culture, and ultimately the creation of an entirely new culture unto itself.

In reviewing the ways in which brand assembles culture, Lury suggests brand must also be regarded as a mass product (2009, p. 73). She proposes that brand can be defined as such "in the sense that it is a medium in which the masses are continuously cut up, differentiated and integrated in the co-ordination of a more-or-less constant flow of products, services and experiences'' (Lury, 2009, p. 73). Segmentation, intricate coordination, and an ongoing flow of information resonate with the fundamentals of Facebook, i.e., as both a brand (assembling culture) and as a mass product—with reference to the global ICT's highly sophisticated algorithmic system.

Returning to the multidimensionality of brand, Lury states that brand is more complex than "'simply' a social construction since the brand plays a part in the production of itself (and other things, including products and markets)" (2009, p. 77). Referring to brand as something that is both socially constructed *and* something that participates in the active and ongoing construction of itself underlines the delicate work of branding and rebranding. This is observable in the case of Facebook and how the socially constructed brand has, itself, been produced *and* participated in its own self-production and construction; but also, as Lury points out, how the global ICT has played an equally active role in the production of other elements—i.e., users/consumers, producers, markets, virtual products, social infrastructure, and ultimately an entirely new participatory global culture.

Relations and time

In addition to brand as assemblage, there is also the temporal and relational aspect of a brand. In keeping with the work of Celia Lury, one can turn to her book *Brands: The Logos of the Global Economy* (2004), in which she argues "that the brand is a set of relations between products in time" (p. 2). These elements of a brand help unpack the complexity of the Facebook brand (now Meta Platforms Inc.).

Lury's argument for the relationality and temporality of brand is evident in this case study of Facebook: the company's relations with its members are very different today compared to a few years ago—pre-publicization of the Cambridge Analytica scandal, and/or pre-disclosure of the Facebook Papers. Public relations with Facebook have changed drastically over time. These popular cases of public disclosure demonstrate Lury's claim of brand as a "set of relations between products in time" (2004, p. 2) insofar as the set of relations between Facebook and its stakeholders has understandably fluctuated throughout this exposure and investigative time period.

Considering brand through a marketing and public relations (PR) lens, Lury introduces concepts of brand awareness, brand image, brand positioning, and brand management, among others. She claims "the aim of such practices is to develop brand image as *the associations that a brand holds for consumers*" (Lury, 2004, pp. 9-10), and returns to her aforementioned case example of Nike to illustrate the concept of association, explaining: "the Nike brand image includes the associations of sports, determination and competitiveness" (Lury, 2004, p. 10). Here, she extends her discussion of association to the media's role in establishing such connections, and the resulting effects of hyperlinking, i.e., "the making of one link after another" (Lury, 2004, p. 10).

These brand marketing concepts can be applied directly to Facebook (now Meta) and its brand awareness, image, and desired associations. Meta, for example, touts a futuristic brand image and brand identity—"[g]iving people the power to build community and bring the world closer together" (Who we are, 2022). Such an innovative, technology-first approach was instantly apparent "[w]hen Facebook launched in 2004, it changed the way people connect […] Now, Meta is moving beyond 2D screens toward immersive experiences like augmented, virtual and mixed reality to help build the next evolution in social technology" (Our Story, 2024). Meta's website exudes this technological enterprising character—with futuristic imagery and a sleek hyper-modern user experience (UX) and functionalities; the company

clearly endeavours to have the public associate the brand with such virtual progressivity.

Rebranding

Advancing the discussion of brand, brand marketing, and PR, the communications tactic of rebranding can be formally introduced here. Commonly classified as a phenomenon (Muzellec & Lambkin, 2006; Schmeltz & Kjeldsen, 2016), rebranding can involve a name change which "entails a major change that completely redefines the organization" (Schmeltz & Kjeldsen, 2016, p. 314), often driven by external pressures and/or the belief that there is a need or benefit in doing so.

Leaning into Silicon Valley idealizations of rebranding and utopic associations of growth, development, and perpetual progress, Facebook rebranded to Meta Platforms Inc. in late October 2021. In Founder and CEO Mark Zuckerberg's words, Facebook's rebrand "reflects the company's increased focus on building a virtual world, known as a metaverse" (Huddleston, 2021, para. 2), and "more clearly define[s] the corporate entity that comprises a suite of apps including Instagram, WhatsApp, Messenger […] and, yes, Facebook" (Rooney, 2019, para. 1). However, as Laurent Muzellec and Mary Lambkin note, publicly communicated reasons for rebranding are not always the actual ones (2006, p. 810). Facebook's rebranding therefore arguably exploited the idealized discourse of perpetual progress associated with rebranding and name change—utilizing the communication tactic to strategically construct and reconstruct its public facing image. Regardless of the motivation behind Zuckerberg's/Facebook's rebrand, the decision illustrates the ICT's prominence, dominance, and embeddedness in society insofar as rebrandings are a "process of creating and maintaining a favourable image and consequently a favourable reputation" (Muzellec & Lambkin, 2006, p. 807).

Further, as Taina Bucher argues: "Facebook is Facebook" (2021, p. 3)—speaking directly to the brand, brand image, and associations the social networking conglomerate has constructed for itself. Moreover, Bucher suggests that failing to recognize the dynamic, ever-changing corporate entity as a "global operating system" (2021, p. 5) is to downplay the societal power and control it wields.

Convergence and convergence discourse

Convergence and convergence discourse also play key roles in branding. Facebook's March 2014 acquisition of Oculus is a prime example of such convergence and how it is interwoven with branding. In the case of Facebook's brand, the

company's acquisition of Oculus demonstrates the ways in which convergence serves as a medium for accentuating one's brand—brand image, identity, and associations. For Facebook, the acquisition of Oculus can be viewed as an exhibition of its progressivity and innovation within the virtual field, insofar as Oculus is "the leader in immersive virtual reality technology" (Facebook to Acquire Oculus, 2014). At this time, in 2014, outside of gaming, the use of virtual reality (VR) was in its early stages.

The value of convergence and the opportunity for brand advancement that it offers are evident. Facebook's acquisition of Oculus (a leader within a new, relatively unknown, and budding field) signaled to the public the company's commitment to the future and the promising, progressive qualities associated with VR. Such an early-stage acquisition indicated how Facebook desired to be situated within the marketplace and displayed the company's aspirations for a technology-first future. Affirming the value of this convergence for Facebook's brand, regarding the acquisition, Brendan Iribe, Co-Founder and CEO of Oculus, shared:

> We are excited to work with Mark and the Facebook team to deliver the very best virtual reality platform in the world […] We believe virtual reality will be heavily defined by social experiences that connect people in magical, new ways. It is a transformative and disruptive technology, that enables the world to experience the impossible, and it's only just the beginning.

> (Facebook to Acquire Oculus, 2014)

Such an ambitious statement underscores the power of brand convergences and convergence discourse and how they shape brand (image, identity, and associations).

Part III: Facebook's Rebrand and its Effects on Facebook as Infrastructure

Bridging these first two sections, (1) infrastructure and (2) brand/rebranding, the precarious paradox Zuckerberg unintentionally created is apparent. The founder posits Facebook as a form of infrastructure—like electricity or chairs—disinterested in 'coolness', striving to operate transparently, as a basic utility. Yet, at the same time, the global ICT is adversely fixated on brand image, identity, and associations. Although basic utilities and infrastructure are unavoidably branded like anything in modern society, one does not often consider the branding of infrastructure (due to its embeddedness and invisibility in daily life). Facebook's rebrand to Meta *could* have advanced the positioning of the company and its portfolio of social platforms as a

form of transparent infrastructure, however, the highly publicized and progressive nature of the rebrand served counterintuitive.

Does rebranding undermine or reinforce the infrastructuring of Facebook/Meta?

Given that rebranding is a "systematically planned and implemented process of creating and maintaining a favourable image and consequently a favourable reputation" (Muzellec & Lambkin, 2006, p. 807), via name change, Facebook's rebrand *had* the potential to reinforce the undertaking of infrastructuring the social platform. However, based on the above analyses of infrastructure and brand as it relates to the publicized and progressive style of Facebook's rebrand (to Meta Platforms Inc.), it can be discerned that Facebook's rebrand does not reinforce its positioning as infrastructural. Rather, the rebrand exhibits instability within the company and its alignment with Silicon Valley associations of innovation, perpetual progress, progressivity, and virtual reality. If Facebook used its late October 2021 rebrand to Meta Platforms Inc. to reinforce its infrastructural tendencies, rather than to highlight its new-world, technology-first approach, the corporate entity *could* have, hypothetically, worked to reposition itself as a form of modern-day infrastructure.

Infrastructure, however, is not homogeneous. As previously discussed, with reference to Star, basic utilities are not infrastructural for all. Citing Star, Bucher expands on the relationality of infrastructure, stating: "'one person's infrastructure is another's topic, or difficulty'" (p. 70). Here, she relies on the "quintessential symbol of disability" (Bucher, 2021, p. 70)—the wheelchair—to, in her words, "[illuminate] the relationality of infrastructures" (Bucher, 2021, p. 70). This relationality of infrastructures encourages caution around universal claims. Infrastructure and basic utilities such as chairs, electricity, and Facebook (should we choose to consider it as such for the purpose of this examination) are not neutral; to some, they are a burden—grossly inhibiting and discriminatory, while to others, they are enabling—their life-blood. Star foregrounds this notion, stating:

> For a highway engineer, the tarmac is not infrastructure but topic of research and development. For the blind person, the graphics programming and standards for the World Wide Web are not helpful supporters of computer use, but barriers that must be worked around.
>
> (2002, p. 116)

Like any form of infrastructure or basic utility, continuous upgrades and advancements are necessary for sustenance and longevity. On this, Lury

acknowledges: "there have been 'enormous transformations […] over the last twenty years in our systems for generating, sharing, and disputing human knowledge'" (2004, p. 52). However, such a major cross-organizational rebranding and restructuring of a dominant ICT like Facebook can also be viewed as a form of instability within the company—straining the user-infrastructure relationship—creating a disconnect and lack of trust between the user/consumer and the brand. The potential for public distrust again underscores the duality of rebranding. With the potential to "wipe out […] mental images that the brand usually stimulates" (Muzellec & Lambkin, 2006, p. 807), rebranding a corporate entity poised as infrastructural that simultaneously yearns for a fundamental shift in brand image and associations illustrates the paradox and risk.

Furthermore, defining rebranding as "a change in an organisation's self-identity and/or an attempt to change perceptions of the image among external stakeholders" (Muzellec & Lambkin, 2006, p. 820) demonstrates that the communication tactic is a disservice to the undertaking of infrastructuring Facebook (now Meta). Such a significant organization-wide rebrand creates the potential for loss of brand identity, image, connection, and associations. Given that Facebook positions itself as utilitarian, with Zuckerberg advancing the platform as infrastructural, rebuilding relationships due to a brand-based disconnect and dissociation is not ideal. Rekindling user/consumer relations and regaining public trust is a long-term branding project—one that requires unwavering consistency and dedication—affirming the disservice of rebranding to the undertaking of infrastructuring Facebook/Meta.

Infrastructure should, without fail, knowingly yet transparently operate within the everyday, only "visible upon breakdown" (Star, 2002, p. 117). Thus, rebranding, and the inevitable heightened salience and reintroduction process that follows, has the potential to negatively influence Facebook as a brand—reversing any existing public perception of the social platform as infrastructural. This again punctuates the paradox Zuckerberg/Facebook has created—positioning Facebook as utilitarian, disinterested in 'coolness', yet visibly concerned with brand (i.e., its image, identity, and associations).

Benefits of rebranding

Rebranding to Meta Platforms Inc. provided few gains; affordances were scarce and did not advance the infrastructuring of the global ICT. Although this shift enabled Facebook to function solely as a brand representative of the social media platform by simultaneously cutting ties with the corporate entity that is Facebook

(now Meta), considerable public uncertainty and doubt transpired with respect to the company's goals and true objectives. Many interpreted the rebrand as an indication of a lack of clarity and evidence of instability within the multinational corporation. If the global conglomerate, itself, is presenting contradictory identities (i.e., "boring", transparent infrastructure versus a highly visible and progressive brand image), how can its user-, consumer-, and producer-base be expected to (a) trust the company, and (b) engage with its social platforms on a daily, infrastructural basis (contrary to its progressive, innovative, and visible brand/brand image)?

Society will, understandably, never be privy to the true intentions behind Facebook's rebrand to Meta Platform Inc. There is a disjointedness, a lack of definity, and a degree of speculation that will persist. Nevertheless, two popular historical examples of rebranding can be referenced as case studies to further comprehend Facebook's actions: firstly, Philip Morris rebranding to The Altria Group and, secondly, Dow Chemical's strategic acquisition of Union Carbide.

Philip Morris, maker of Marlboro, one of the world's top-selling cigarette brands, publicly rebranded to The Altria Group following 12 years of strategizing and high-level consulting with public relations firms. The rebrand was designed to separate its tobacco brand from its holding company (which also includes Kraft Foods and Miller Brewing among others), as brand recognition was "almost entirely negative, associated only with tobacco" (Smith & Malone, 2003, p. 553). This delineation-driven and public perception-based rebrand is comparable to Facebook's rebrand to Meta Platforms Inc. Although multipurpose, a key driver of Facebook's rebrand was to clearly and publicly delineate Facebook (the social media platform) from Facebook (the parent/holding company). In further similarity, Philip Morris leveraged its rebrand to "distance the corporation and its other operating companies from negative publicity" (Smith & Malone, 2003, para. 553).

In the second historical case example, Dow Chemical was strategic in acquiring Union Carbide in 2001—illustrating awareness of the professional weight of brand identity. "Dow Chemical abandoned the Union Carbide name because of an internationally known scandal [...] Union Carbide is now considered a subsidiary of Dow rather than an integral part of the parent name" (Chapman, 2020, para. 17). Merging in this way enabled Dow Chemical to acquire Union Carbide's "valuable assets" (Chapman, 2020, para. 17) while avoiding a potentially brand-tarnishing acquisition (due to Union Carbide's association with the historic 1984 methyl isocyanate gas leak in Bhopal, India, which killed thousands).

Union Carbide's permanent association with the world's worst industrial accident (Tremblay, 2011) stresses the importance of Dow Chemical's cautious and

deliberate efforts when acquiring the tainted brand over two decades ago. Extracting the value from Union Carbide and then quietly disposing of the brand name and outstanding obligations through strategic acquisition and rebranding tactics enabled Dow Chemical to uphold its public-facing image. Facebook employed a similar tactic when rebranding to Meta—attempting to dissociate from outstanding and unaddressed brand name-related issues, news cases, and complications.

Although Facebook risked losing the trust and confidence of its users/consumers in the rebranding process, authenticity was already strained. Rebranding at this specific time, referencing Lury's argument that "brand is *a set of relations between products in time*" (2004, p. 2), while facing considerable public scrutiny stemming from accusations of the "spread of misinformation and hate speech, and its potential to be harmful for teenagers and children'' (Huddleston, 2021, para. 3), coupled with "fallout from the Facebook Papers" (Anderson, 2021, para. 2) placed the corporate entity in an increasingly precipitous situation—jeopardizing its brand, brand identity, and brand associations, although again, these elements were already tainted.

Rebranding being "a change in an organisation's self-identity and/or an attempt to change perceptions of the image among external stakeholders" (Muzellec & Lambkin, 2006, p. 820) draws attention to what is gained, or at least what Facebook *hoped* to gain in the rebranding process to Meta Platforms Inc. On the surface, Facebook achieved such rebranding affordances; although rebranding could not ensure Zuckerberg that all negative brand associations would vanish. What the rebrand did present, was the *opportunity* to reintroduce, redefine, and re-establish the global ICT's brand. It is this *opportunity* to resituate the arguably tainted brand that was ultimately the motivator and potential benefit of the rebranding process. As illustrated in both case examples—Philip Morris rebranding to The Altria Group, and Dow Chemical acquiring Union Carbide—brand image and brand associations are paramount to a company's success. Like Facebook's rebrand to Meta, in both historic instances, the parent organizations utilized the communication tactic of rebranding to strategically exploit public dopamine responses associated with new and undefined brands.

This organization-based brand shift and repositioning of corporate entity identity by way of rebranding provided Facebook (now Meta) an opportunity to capitalize on the brand reintroduction process which includes re-establishment in the marketplace, and a reconfiguration of brand image and brand associations (Lury, 2004). This enabled the corporate entity to reinvent itself and redefine its idyllic associations. The "new" brand (i.e., Meta) was introduced as a progressive virtual

space (metaverse) for digital natives and forward-thinkers—undefined and limitless, detached from previous corporate mishaps.

The rebrand from Facebook to Meta, however, exists in opposition to Zuckerberg's positioning of Facebook as infrastructural. Meta and the associated metaverse exude 'coolness' and a general sense of innovation and progressivity—concepts true infrastructure is not concerned with.

Branding and rebranding as part of Facebook's infrastructuring project

Branding is clearly essential to Facebook insofar as brand dictates public perception. If a given brand is not advancing the company's desired image and associations, then it is simply an unsuccessful brand/rebrand. Reconfiguring public perception by way of rebranding—to portray the image and associations the company desires to be equated with the brand—illustrates how rebranding is part of Facebook's infrastructuring project. The success is nevertheless questionable and fundamentally paradoxical, e.g., did Facebook's rebrand to Meta improve public perception of the company and its brand? Did Facebook's rebrand to Meta advance Facebook's equivalence with infrastructure?

The affordances of rebranding play a dual role in Facebook's infrastructuring project. On one hand, the rebrand naturally facilitates a public reintroduction with the potential to assist the corporate entity in positioning itself as infrastructural. However, on the other hand, due to the nature of Facebook's rebrand, the company's concern with brand—image, identity, associations, and ultimately 'coolness'—supersedes Zuckerberg's utilitarian claims.

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