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Theme

On transmedia narratives: An Analysis of The Last of Us Videogame and TV Series

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Abstract

This bachelor's thesis deals with the main concepts of transmedia narratology and its representations across media. Its abstraction and complexity provide a robust theoretical framework, which will be filtered through a multimodal analysis of four perspectives that will allow us to understand how storyworlds and the subjectivity of characters are constructed and represented. With this result, an analysis will be made of how these two variables are configured in the video game and TV series "The Last of Us", in order to differentiate how the modes create a meaning, and how this meaning is represented in two or more media.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Media mix or *mediamikkusu* in wasei-eigo, Japanese expressions based on or ‘borrowed’ from English words (Miller, 1998), refers to a strategy used to spread content across multiple representations such as broadcast media, portable technologies and location-based entertainment (Jenkins, 2006, p. 110). Although this Japanese marketing strategy has its roots in the 1960s (Steinberg, 2012, p. 136), similar concepts were already found in earlier works. Samuel Richardson’s “Pamela; or, Virtue Rewarded”, published in 1740, exhibited transmedia characteristics by being published in periodic instalments in the form of letters and blurring the line between fiction and non-fiction, showing an early focus on interactive storytelling with the reader (Prior, 2013).

American media scholar and professor Henry Jenkins first introduced the term *transmedia storytelling* in his widely cited article in *Technology Review* (2003). He argued that this phenomenon is shaping the future of entertainment as media convergence enables a holistic narrative experience by distributing content across multiple formats. Younger consumers, becoming information hunters and story explorers, demand transmedia experiences that provide new narrative dimensions and depths, rather than mere repetition, reflecting a shift toward richer, multidimensional storytelling, thereby avoiding the current model of adaptation that often results in redundant and inconsistent works.

Transmedia storytelling, or transmedia narrative, refers to the practice of telling a story using multiple media platforms, each of which contributes something different and meaningful to the overall narrative, with each medium exploiting its specific strengths. Each part of the franchise should stand alone, providing different points of entry into the franchise, and by interacting with these multiple media, the experience is deepened, stimulating greater interest and consumption (Jenkins, 2006, pp. 95-96).

Transmediality has emerged as a space of convergence for scholars from multiple disciplines, bringing together creators and audiences who are involved in new forms of creation, production and narrative participation through the multiple platforms that this entails (Martínez et al., 2016). Today, it can be said that people have never had access to so many devices and screens to follow a story as now, and consumers want innovative experiences and a more intense level of engagement. Stories are created and consumed differently than in the past (Fiorelli, 2021).

1.2 Problem statement

In the wake of technological and cultural convergence, the visibility of various forms of intermedial adaptations has increased, as well as the sustained growth of transmedia entertainment franchises (Thon, 2016, Introduction section, para. 1). Media studies have not only recognized the sociocultural importance of these storyworlds, but also the methodological challenges they pose (Thon, 2016, Introduction section, para. 31).

Jan-Noël Thon in his book *Transmedia Narratology and Contemporary Media Culture*, presents a broad theoretical framework for understanding the representation of storyworlds, narrator, and subjectivity across different media. However, the proposed analytical approach can be considered too general (Thon, 2016, p. 7), which leaves room for the development of a tool that, without losing precision, allows for a more balanced analysis, avoiding both excessive generality and a specificity that limits the scope of the research.

These representations face considerable challenges due to the particularities and inherent restrictions of each medium. Furthermore, their level of abstraction makes complete conceptualization difficult, resulting in a complex and variable block of information, composed of diverse concepts, theories and approaches.

1.3 Objective / Research question

The aim of this paper is to examine how transmedia concepts are expressed through various media, using a qualitative methodology of multimodal analysis from four perspectives, allowing a detailed understanding of the interaction between different modes of communication in the construction and transmission of a message. This observation, formulated as the central hypothesis of the bachelor thesis, suggests that this methodology constitutes a fundamental tool for the analysis of these concepts.

The content will investigate the similarities and differences between transmedia and multimodal representations in two of the three existing formats of “The Last of Us”, looking for distinctive features and points of convergence. The results obtained will not only provide a tool for analysis, but will also facilitate an easier understanding of transmedia concepts in practice, being a useful reference for future work. The main research question guiding this work is: How does a multimodal analysis contribute to the examination of concepts present across media?

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Toward a Transmedia Narratology – A critical overview from a historical and systematic perspective

To understand the evolution and current relevance of transmedia narrative, it is essential to trace its origins and development over time. Narratology, as a humanities discipline dedicated to the analysis of the logic, principles and techniques of narrative representation (Meister, 2011, para. 1), has its roots in French structuralism (Thon, 2006, p. 1). This intellectual current and methodological approach focuses on unraveling the underlying structural patterns in human activities, thoughts, perceptions and emotions. The eighth journal issue of *Communications* in 1966 marks a crucial milestone in the history of narratology, bringing together contributions from leading theorists such as Roland Barthes, Gérard Genette, Claude Brémont and Tzvetan Todorov. This issue promotes a structured view of narratives, proposing that stories are not mere chaotic successions of events, but organized systems that follow common patterns and rules. Barthes (1975), in his *Introduction à l'analyse structurale des récits* (Introduction to the structural analysis of narratives), included in the journal, lays the foundations of structural narratology by decomposing narratives into fundamental units for the analysis of their internal structures. The publication of this volume legitimizes the scientific study of narrative and paves the way for the further development of narratology. Thus, Todorov coined the term narratology in his work *Grammaire du Decameron*, where he describes it as the *science du récit* (science of narrative), reflecting the first scientific aspirations of this discipline (Meister, 2011, para. 13; Wake, 2010).

With the beginning of the new decade, the so-called 'high structuralists' (Scholes, 1975, p. 157) sought narrative universals for the practice of narrative science. In addition to exploring universal narratological concepts, they also focused on laws so abstract that they are of little value for the analysis of concrete narrative representations (Thon, 2016, p. 2). However, Gérard Genette (1980, p. 27) extended the binary model proposed by Todorov (Thon, 2016, p. 2), which distinguished between *histoire* and *discours*, by introducing a third element: narrating. This tripartite model emphasizes the way narrative is presented, shifting the exclusive focus on the events of history and giving rise to a narratology that focuses on the act of narrating (Thon, 2016, p. 3). Despite its notable influence, Genette's theory has been criticized for its scant attention to non-literary narrative forms. This criticism reflects a tendency among literary critics to focus on the verbal medium, despite the fact that they daily

experience stories through diverse media such as film, comics, painting, sculpture, dance, and music (Chatman, 1978, p. 9).

In the following decade, two key trends emerged: the expansion of the scope of narratology into non-literary narratives and the incorporation of concepts and theories from diverse disciplines (Ryan & van Alphen, 1993, p. 112). This process was accompanied by a remarkable diversification and sophistication of narratological practice beginning in the 1980s, driven largely by the innovative work of pioneering scholars who laid the groundwork for these transformations (Thon, 2016, p. 4). Chatman showed the use of narratology to the analysis of visual narratives, expanding the field beyond literary texts. Bal et al. explored narratology's ability to address phenomena of intertextuality and intermediality, anticipating discussions of transmediality. Pavel and Doležel introduced modal logic and possible worlds theory, allowing for the exploration of alternative narratives, unrealized desires, and virtual realities within fiction, alluding to the theoretical possibility of alternative courses of events underlying characters' decisions and thoughts (Meister, 2011, para. 41). Finally, the post-classical phase of narratology was characterized by the application of narratological concepts to a variety of disciplines, including literary studies, art, history, psychology, philosophy, and medicine. This interdisciplinary approach allowed for a deeper examination of how narratives influence human experience and knowledge construction within these fields (Meuter, 2011).

As the new millennium approached, the debate around narratology underwent a significant transformation. The shift towards a more pragmatic theory and the critique of the structuralist approach led to new perspectives in narratology (Meister, 2011, para. 42). In response to this theoretical expansion, Nünning organized the new narratologies into eight distinct categories, three of which have become predominant methodological approaches in narratology today (Thon, 2016, pp. 1 - 2). Contextual narratology links narrative phenomena to their cultural, historical, thematic and ideological contexts. This approach broadens the analysis by considering not only the structure but also the narrative content in its entirety. This turn towards context prompted new ways of approaching narrative, which were no longer limited to the traditional literary text, but began to consider how people process and understand stories on an intellectual and emotional level. Along these lines, cognitive narratology delves into the internal mechanisms by which humans interpret and respond to narratives, suggesting that the ability to understand and convey experiences through stories is rooted in our anthropological nature. Finally, transgeneric and intermedial approaches extend this theoretical framework by exploring the applicability of narratological concepts in

diverse genres and media, such as drama, poetry, film, music, visual and performative arts, video games, among others (Meister, 2011, para. 45 – 47).

The arrival of the new millennium brought with it an interaction between technical invention and cultural expression, thus forming a unique new medium of representation called the digital medium (Murray, 2003, p. 3). This intersection between computer science, science, humanities, and the visual and performing arts, enriched narratological approaches facilitating the understanding of narrative phenomena through diverse media. In this framework, it is essential to distinguish how narratives can operate within different media, either confined to a single format, as in the case of intramediality, or crossing media boundaries but with a clear media origin, as occurs in intermediality (Thon, 2016, p. 12). However, the expansion towards a truly transversal approach is manifested in transmediality, a concept that describes narrative phenomena that manifest themselves through different media (*medienübergreifende Phänomene*), adapting to the unique characteristics of each without relying on a specific original medium (Thon, 2016, p. 11).

These phenomena can be applied both to content that is transferred between media and to elements and styles present in various forms of communication. Narrativity, as a fundamental form of representation, clearly manifests the quality of transmediality (Wolf, 2011, pp. 4 - 5). While narrative refers to a sequence of related events or experiences (Cambridge University Press & Assessment, 2024), narrativity is defined by the characteristics that enable something to be perceived as a narrative, encompassing the degree to which a medium succeeds in telling a story (Abbott, 2011). Given that narratology studies structurally and theoretically how narratives are constructed and represented in different media, it is evident that transmedia phenomena, by influencing narrativity, also affect narrative and thus narratology. This interconnectedness underscores the importance of integrating the analysis of transmediality to fully understand the dynamics of contemporary narratives.

Marie-Laure Ryan points out three key methodological challenges facing transmedia narratology, both generally and specifically (Thon, 2016, p. 20). First, the temptation to idiosyncrasy, which consists of considering the particular characteristics of an individual text as if they were representative of the entire medium in question (Ryan, 2004, p. 33). Second, media blindness, which refers to the indiscriminate transfer of concepts designed to analyze narratives in a specific medium to other media (Ryan, 2004, p. 34). Third, media relativism, which assumes that each medium, being distinct, requires a completely different set of narratological tools (Ryan, 2004, p. 34). Still, despite these challenges, it is important to

recognize that all narratives share a common structure, although they present variations due to different genres and formats (Thon, 2016, p. 21), and to overcome media blindness, it is essential to maintain a media-conscious perspective, which implies considering the granularity of narratological concepts (Thon, 2016, p. 22). That is, although some concepts and terms are specifically developed for certain media and do not apply in the same way in others, the point is not to discard them altogether, but to distinguish useful pieces that can contribute to a broader and more flexible understanding. Therefore, instead of looking for absolute universals, it is crucial to find a balance: avoid overly specific elements that only work in one medium, as well as those that are too general and lose precision.

2.2 Multimodality – Perspectives on a Method of Analysis

For much of Western history, a strong preference for monomodality has prevailed (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001, p. 1), implying the use of a single mode of expression. This approach was reflected in highly valued genres: from literary novels to official documents, which lacked images and were limited to text; in the visual arts, where canvas and oil painting were the only supports; and in classical music, performed with a formal rigor that restricted bodily expression. The theoretical and critical disciplines also developed in isolation, each with its own language and methodology.

With the onset of the digital era and the increase in interaction between various forms of expression, a significant shift towards multimodality has emerged. This concept, which combines multiple and mode, describes how we integrate various modes of communication (Arola et al., 2014, p. 1). Today, this paradigm is characterized by the incorporation of multiple semiotic modes -such as text, image and sound- within the same medium or cultural product, as an example are television commercials, which usually combine music, voice, video and text, to convey a message more effectively. This shift towards multimodality not only responds to the desire to break down barriers between disciplines, but also turns the notion of mode into a key concept, seeking a theory that understands the interrelationship that defines contemporary communication.

A mode is, in general terms, a form of communication (Arola et al., 2014, p. 1). However, this definition becomes more complex when we recognize that each mode acts as a semiotic resource shaped not only by the inherent properties and capabilities of the medium, but also by the demands, narratives, and values of societies and cultures, which come together to give it meaning (Kress, 2009, p. 79; Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996, p. 34). Despite these conceptual advances, a satisfactory and unambiguous definition of the term mode has not

yet been reached, as questions persist as to which semiotic resources should be considered as such, how they are delimited and how many exist (Sachs-Hombach et al., 2018, pp. 10 - 11).

Multimodality is not limited only to the combination of different semiotic modes, but also encompasses the interaction between their various dimensions (Sachs-Hombach et al., 2018, p. 9). Therefore, multimodality research must go beyond analyzing how media facilitate communication and how it influences human perception, and must expand its scope to include the impact of these interactions on perceptual experience (Sachs-Hombach et al., 2018, pp. 11 - 12). This methodological approach focuses on analyzing multiple modes of communication, recognizing that we, as recipients, construct meaning multimodally by employing diverse semiotic resources (Ledin & Machin, 2020, pp. 31, 193) and by perceiving and interpreting these elements (Bezemer & Jewitt, 2010, p. 180; Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001, p. 68). In this context, meaning emerges as a process of production or participation; it is the result of human engagement, where each individual integrates a semiotic element within his or her own classification system (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001, p. 68). Furthermore, our interpretations are grounded in a referential relationship between abstract concepts and concrete metaphors (Lyons, 2015), which underscores the importance of considering how these elements interact and are configured in our understanding of the world.

Firstly, multimodality has an undeniable semiotic dimension or perspective, although it has not yet been defined how many semiotic modes exist and how to clearly establish each of the modalities. The interaction between text and image is the most studied and recognized, but it is also considered fundamental to explore other modes such as gestures, sounds and visual design. The creation of meaning through different modes and their interaction results in a variety of combinations, where each mode can play different roles in the communicative process. Furthermore, it is relevant to consider how combinations of modes can be functional, dysfunctional or even ironic, depending on the relationship between the elements (Sachs-Hombach et al., 2018, pp. 14 - 15). This approach allows for a deeper and more nuanced analysis of semiotic elements in multimodal contexts, highlighting the importance of investigating how the dynamics between different modes affect the constitution of meaning in specific communication situations.

On the other hand, when a stimulus or a set of stimuli are processed through at least two perceptual modes in the communicative process, we are talking about a perceptual dimension or perspective. Each mode is commonly associated with one of the five senses:

visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory and tactile. However, in everyday experience, these senses rarely operate in isolation; rather, they combine in multimodal clusters. This phenomenon is illustrated through synesthesia, which challenges the notion that the senses operate separately. Synesthesia reveals the existence of intersensory relationships and suggests more than seventy possible combinations of sensory experiences (Sachs-Hombach et al., 2018, pp. 12 - 13). This approach allows understanding how the interaction of different senses enriches the experience and interpretation of communicative messages.

There are different modes in the media that combine and relate to each other, forming complex media experiences. This other dimension or participatory perspective of multimodality has gained importance because of its link to opportunities for participation in digital media, and not only analyzes narrative or technical characteristics, but also how modes of action and being are connected in diverse media environments. These environments can facilitate, but also limit, the active or passive participation of users. Starting from the modalization of existence, transformations in the material, cognitive and affective capacities of the body in interaction with technological innovations are explored. This includes the study of practices such as interaction in social networks, the use of applications and the formation of digital communities, analyzing how these multimodal contexts shape participation (Sachs-Hombach et al., 2018, pp. 18 - 19) . This approach enables an in-depth understanding of how interactions and relationships in media environments shape experiences and practices of participation.

As we explore these dynamics, it becomes crucial to structure this analysis around four perspectives that contribute to this understanding: semiotic, perceptual, participatory and referential. Each of these dimensions will provide a unique lens through which to examine how meanings are constructed in the context of contemporary communication.

3. ANALYSIS

3.1 Storyworlds – Ways of World Making

3.1.1 Storyworlds Transmedial

Prototypical narratives, by depicting worlds populated by characters in a specific space and time, reveal an interesting variability in their projection across different media. Wolf Schmid advocates the expansion of the two-part narrative model (story and discourse, according to Chatman, 1978, p. 19) and three-part narrative models (story, narrative and narrating, according to Genette, 1980, p. 27) to a four-part model: happenings, story, narrative and presentation of the narrative. Happenings encompass the indefinite totality of situations, characters and actions present in the work, whether explicit or implicit. From these happenings, the story is constructed, which results from the selection of events in a natural order. Narrative, on the other hand, organizes these elements in an artificial order for their presentation, while the presentation of the narrative includes all observable representations of these elements. This distinction is fundamental, since it allows us to differentiate between the story, as a chronological succession of events, and the discourse, which refers to the way in which these events are presented. It is also necessary to distinguish between the story in its natural order and the plot, which organizes the events according to the narrative order. By differentiating between happenings and stories, it is clear that the narrative world includes more elements than those necessary for the main plot, such as contextual details and implicit elements that expand the story (Thon, 2016, p. 35–36).

A deeper look into the concept of storyworlds reveals that they are worlds constructed from narrative, where recipients use textual cues to form mental representations of these universes. However, despite sharing a common conceptual core, the representation of storyworlds varies considerably due to the diversity of theoretical approaches and terminological complexity, making a unified understanding of the term difficult. This challenge is accentuated by the limitations of structuralist narratology, which does not adequately address how narratives create worlds that transcend explicit content (Thon, 2016, p. 37).

Narrative implicit content manifests itself in a variety of ways. For example, *diegesis* (*diégèse* in French) describes the spatiotemporal universe in which the story takes place, without being the story itself, and suggests a logic that involves a set of possible plot details not mentioned but that can be inferred. Therefore, the recipient must fill in the gaps with essential events, features, and objects (Chatman, 1978, pp. 28–29). Furthermore, the

happenings of a work are not directly accessible to the reader; they are presented as a reconstruction based on the narrative represented (Thon, 2016, pp. 37–39). These aspects illustrate how storyworlds transcend what is shown in the narrative, taking the complexity of the concept to new horizons, including its exploration in cognitive narratology (Thon, 2016, p. 39), which studies how recipients interpret and reconstruct implicit narrative elements.

Storyworlds and fictional worlds are influenced by the semantics of possible worlds, although they are not equivalent (Thon, 2016, p. 39). While possible worlds represent abstract models of hypothetical realities, fictional worlds and storyworlds constitute narrative constructions with their own rules, considered as ensembles of nonactualized possible states of affairs. This suggests that they are not limited only to what happens in the story, but encompass all possible situations and events that could have happened within that narrative universe. Although these possibilities are not actualized in the concrete story, they are accessible through semiotic channels and textual poesis (from the Greek *ποίησις*, meaning creation or production). This process occurs when the recipient interacts with the text created by the author, thus reconstructing a fictional world. Incompleteness is resolved by using general knowledge of the real world and story-specific knowledge acquired through reading.

Fictional worlds can be understood as mental constructions. Through the phenomenon known as fictional recentering, readers immerse themselves in fiction, allowing characters to come to life and the storyworld they inhabit to momentarily replace reality. These narrative universes are complex and multi-layered, including several private worlds of the characters, such as the knowledge-world, wish-world, obligation-world, and fantasy-world. Because of this complexity, readers project their empirical knowledge of the real world, whether from direct experiences or from other media sources, adjusting the elements that the text specifies as different in a process known as the principle of minimal departure.

Both approaches focus on fictional worlds depicted in literary texts. However, a third transmedial approach considers various representations as props in games of make-believe, which guide the imagination of recipients and encourage them to imagine fictional truths present in multiple media. This approach complements the principle of minimal departure with the reality principle and the mutual belief principle. When constructing fictional worlds, it is essential to reflect reality according to the truths that govern these fictional worlds, recognizing that the perception of the real world is based not on its objective truth, but on how it is understood within the artist's society. A distinction is also made between work worlds and game worlds, referring to the realities constructed by narratives

and game worlds that encompass the individual interpretations and imaginations that recipients create when interacting with these representations (Thon, 2016, pp. 40–42).

It is therefore accurate to say that storyworlds are best understood as semiotic objects or mental constructs (Thon, 2016, p. 42), as their perception and reconstruction by the viewer depends on how the narrative data is presented and processed in the mind. This phenomenon has been widely discussed in both fictional worlds theory and cognitive narratology. According to Branigan, the viewer transforms the data presented on screen through various spatial, temporal and causal schemes, allowing for the construction of hypotheses about narrative relationships two at a time. Although this process is primarily focused on film, it also extends to other media, suggesting that narrative hypothesis building is a transmedial phenomenon (Thon, 2016, p. 43). According to Gerrig, storyworlds should be conceived as a specific form of situation models, as the metaphor of being transported more adequately captures the complexity of the experience that readers live when interacting with narratives. From a perspective that combines cognitive psychology and reader response theory, the author highlights the importance of the inferences that readers make during the act of reading. In particular, the perception of causal relationships is fundamental, as it guides the understanding of the narrative and facilitates the overall coherence of the mental representations that are formed in the process (Thon, 2016, p. 44).

This way in which recipients construct such worlds remains consistent across media, but it is David Herman who establishes the storyworld as a truly transmedial concept, conceiving it as global mental models that represent who did what, with whom, when, where, why, and in what way in the narrative world into which recipients are transported. These models encompass not only the explicit stories of a text, but also the implicitly evoked worlds, whether the narrative is presented in a printed text, a film, a graphic novel, sign language, or conversation. He also emphasizes how textual, visual, auditory, or other semiotic cues are anchored to shape these storyworlds. Thus, narrators use the semiotic tools of each medium to design schemes that facilitate the creation and updating of these worlds, projecting them as coherent mental representations that, although they never materialize as tangible objects, structure our narrative understanding through different formats (Thon, 2016, pp. 44 – 46).

Hence, although narratives are expressed in specific media, the concept of storyworld transcends these boundaries and is applied in a transmedia manner, adapting to the particularities of each medium without being identical in all of them. It should be noted that narrative worlds encompass entities, events, characters and the spatial, temporal and

causal relationships established between them, elements that are essential for a comprehensive understanding of the story.

There is agreement on the elements that make up a narrative. Seymour Chatman (1978, p. 25) identifies three fundamental components: events, characters, and setting details. Wolf Schmid also highlights the importance of situations, characters, and actions within a depicted narrative world. Patrick C. Hogan emphasizes that situation models of the story, which are complex structures incorporating characters, events, and motifs, need to be constantly formed and adjusted. Along these lines, David Herman describes narrative worlds as mental models that reflect the situations, characters, and events narrated. These approaches show the interconnection of the various elements that make up the narrative experience, always repeating the element of character, since through it events develop and the situations that shape the story are configured. Narrative understanding, therefore, can largely be described as a process of reconstructing the spatial, temporal, and causal relationships between the situations depicted. Narratives often select situations that may seem disconnected in these aspects, requiring the recipient to establish connections between them in order to understand the narrative whole (Thon, 2016, p. 46 – 47).

Narrative is governed by chronology as a fundamental principle of concatenation, complemented by teleology. This concept refers not only to the desires of the characters, but also to structural factors that guide the development of the story. Hence, narratives are composed of events that lead toward an end or purpose, both internally, through the desires of the characters, and externally, reflecting the author's purpose of telling a relevant story. Unlike objects, characters have mental states that include emotions, thoughts, perceptions, and goals, which allows us to distinguish between simple events and actions within the narrated events. These narrative elements are integrated through causality, which makes it easier for the recipients to understand the purpose and evolution of the story (Thon, 2016, pp. 48-49).

Storyworlds are constructed from what is presented and what the listeners infer. However, some gaps may not be filled, and this is because the listener's knowledge of the world can only provide general additional information, limiting the possibilities of answering only a few questions. While recipients claim that the storyworld is complete, most scholars of fictional worlds claim that these worlds are actually incomplete. Furthermore, many narrative texts present scenarios and events that seem physically or logically impossible, exploring the limits of the imaginable. While physically impossible events violate natural laws, logically impossible ones contradict basic principles of logic. However, although fictional worlds that

include contradictions, that is, internal contradictions or mutually incompatible events, are logically impossible, their narrative coherence does not necessarily fall apart in the face of these inconsistencies, since recipients can accept them within the fictional context, allowing the narrative to maintain its integrity (Thon, 2016, pp. 55 – 57).

Recipients ignore aspects of the narrative in order to construct intersubjective storyworlds, either by seeking explanations external to the narrative world or internal ones. They will try to exhaust all alternative explanatory possibilities before imagining a contradictory and logically impossible storyworld. Hence, when encountering contradictory or logically impossible situations, they often seek explanations that allow them to fit these situations into different subworlds or diegetic levels within the storyworld (Thon, 2016, p. 61, 63). To better understand this dynamic, it is essential to clarify the concept of diegetic levels. Each narrated event can be situated on a different diegetic level than the level where the narrative act that generates it occurs. This narration may not always be oral or written; it may appear, explicitly or implicitly, as an internal narration or a memory of a character, either in a dream or in wakefulness. In this context, it is relevant to explore the different types of diegetic levels that exist. Thus, we find an extradiegetic level that houses a narrator external to the story, who relates what happens in the primary diegetic level, where there may be an intradiegetic narrator or a character who narrates within the universe of the story. In turn, the intradiegetic narrator can tell a story in a secondary metadiegetic level, which could include another metadiegetic narrator. This process can continue up to tertiary meta-metadiegetic levels and beyond, creating a complex narrative structure that expands indefinitely (Thon, 2016, p. 49).

To summarize this robust and deep theoretical framework of what storyworlds are, I would like to contribute to the whole by suggesting that storyworlds can be understood as intentional universes, populated by characters, events and locations that transcend what is narrated in the main story. These mental models are constructed by the recipient and interpreted, showing that, ultimately, each storyworld is an interaction with the narrative. This transmedial concept explores how narrative worlds can be further expanded in multimodal environments, where not only different media, but also diverse modes of communication interact to create complex narrative experiences, capable of involving recipients in a process of immersion and reconstruction of even more dynamic and participatory fictional realities.

3.1.2 Storyworlds Multimodal

Multimodality has gained increasing relevance in literary theory and media studies, particularly in the way different modes—such as image, writing, design, music, gesture,

speech, moving images, and sound—are used to represent communication (Thon, 2016, p. 72). Because of this, it is important to delineate which modes are relevant to the construction and representation of storyworlds through contemporary media.

Language is a powerful tool for expressing concepts such as temporality, change, and causal relationships within a story. With its ability to make clear propositions and refer to specific objects and features, it allows for the exploration of dialogue and characters' inner thoughts, as well as distinguishing between what is real and what is hypothetical or counterfactual. Language also facilitates critical evaluation of events and characters, offering a reflective view of the story world. However, its ability to accurately describe spatial relationships is limited. Although it can evoke abstract images, it fails to accurately detail the physical or visual arrangement of elements within the storyworld. On the other hand, images or frames complement this deficiency of language. Through them, spatial and physical details become visible, providing a tangible representation of the story world. Music, on the other hand, adds a more sensorial layer, providing an emotional and atmospheric dimension that few other modes achieve, creating suspense and arousing emotions, generating anticipation for what is to come. Thus, this multichannel (or multimodal) entanglement complements each other, each contributing to form an essential part of the overall imaginative experience (Thon, 2016, pp. 71 – 72).

The presentation of narrative encompasses all features accessible through direct experience, including elements such as written text, visual images, dialogue, acting, and music, as well as other sensorially perceptible components. Storyworlds are thus constructed and accessed both through different channels and through semiotic cues, allowing for complex mental representation. This dynamic suggests that, like storyworlds, their fundamental pillars—characters, events, settings, situations, and happenings—are also represented through these semiotic resources. And for the purpose of this study, since narratives function as verbal or visual cue systems (Thon, 2016, p. 47), I will limit the resources to language, which includes texts within and outside the narrative universe, and image (and sound), which comprises visual (and sound) representations of settings and characters.

Recipients, when confronted with a narrative, undergo a cognitive process in which they relate the textual, spatial, temporal and causal cues presented with the images represented, projecting a mental representation of the narrative world in their mind. From these resources, they build relationships and reconstruct the storyworld, connecting situations that in the narrative may appear disconnected in spatial, temporal and causal terms. This

reconstruction process allows recipients to understand narrative events as a constantly evolving configuration, thus differentiating actions motivated by the desires or impulses of the character(s) from simple events.

In addition, in the construction of this world, some details that are not explicitly mentioned in the narrative are completed by the recipients, who contribute them based on their knowledge of the narrative world and reality, or they ignore them. This active participation allows them to refocus on the fictional world, imagining fictional truths and, at the same time, expanding or modifying said world based on their own understanding and experience, integrating what the text suggests with their own interpretation.

Storyworlds are built around a referential meaning (Thon, 2016, p. 54), which means that both the understanding of situations and the reconstruction of relationships between depicted events are based on references to knowledge of the real world and that acquired in the fictional world. As recipients interpret the plot, they establish referential connections not only with the broader fictional world in which the plot takes place, but also with the private worlds of the characters, whose actions reflect their mental states, motivations, and goals. The narrative purpose that organizes the story is therefore tied to the author's intentions and the characters' motivations, making narrative actions comprehensible in terms of these references.

3.1.3 Storyworld Construction in “The Last of Us”

Narrative cues are fundamental to the construction of the storyworld in any medium, which means that in order to fully understand the narrative universe of “The Last of Us”, it is necessary to analyze how it is configured and represented transmedially. This storyworld is based on a reality analogous to our own, anchored in a contemporary context with recognizable places, societies and cultures. However, this is radically transformed by a fictional pandemic caused by the mutation of the Cordyceps fungus. Initially introduced in the video game, this universe is enriched in the television series, which incorporates new layers of information, as will be seen below.



Figure 1. Interview with scientist in "The Last of Us". HBO, 2023.

The opening scenes of the series, set in the 1960s, introduce a scientific concern regarding fungi as a latent threat to humanity. In a television interview, a specialist cautions that while fungi do not pose a threat to humans under normal conditions, a potential increase in global temperatures could facilitate their adaptation, enabling them to infect and control humans, thereby triggering a pandemic with devastating consequences (see Figure 1).

Fast forward in 2003, an Indonesian scientist is called by the authorities to investigate an unusual case of human infection by the Cordyceps fungus, previously considered harmless (see Figure 2). This event constitutes the first officially recorded contagion within this narrative universe.



Figure 2. Infected corpse in "The Last of Us". HBO, 2023.

On September 26, just two days later, the virus reaches the United States. Although the day begins seemingly calmly (see Figure 3), chaos breaks out as the day progresses (see Figures 4 and 5). This day, known as Outbreak Day, marks a turning point in the narrative.



Figure 3. View of downtown Austin, Texas in "The Last of Us". HBO, 2023.



Figure 4. Fire trucks sound in the background in "The Last of Us". HBO, 2023.



Figure 5. Military planes fly over the sky in “The Last of Us”. HBO, 2023.

“The Last of Us” video game begins now. In the early hours of the morning (see Figure 6), chaos breaks out: the disoriented population faces a situation in which the media is saturated and each person acts individually, trying to survive (see Figure 7).

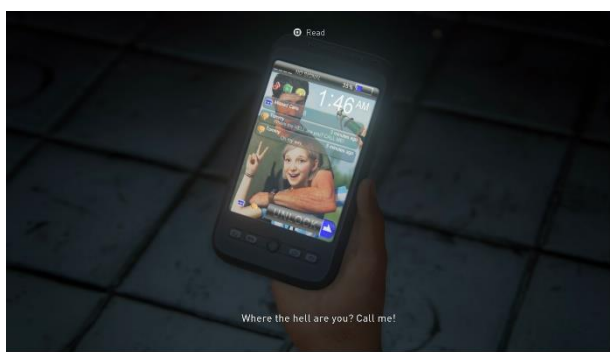


Figure 6. Joel's phone without signal in “The Last of Us”. Naughty Dog, 2013.



Figure 7. Joel, Tommy and Sarah find people on the highway in “The Last of Us”. Naughty Dog, 2013.

The climax of this chaos is reached when the social system completely collapses (see Figure 8). Explosions and sirens fill the air, while flames devour buildings and anarchy takes over. With the social order crumbling, humanity faces not only devastation, but also the growing threat of the infected, who, transformed into zombies, intensify the horror that reigns in this scenario of chaos (see Figure 9).



Figure 8. Joel making his way through the chaos in “The Last of Us”. Naughty Dog, 2013.



Figure 9. Joel and Sarah encounter zombies in “The Last of Us”. HBO, 2023.

This context explains why, twenty years after Outbreak Day, the post-apocalyptic world has taken its current form. Nature has reclaimed the spaces abandoned by civilization,

transforming decaying urban landscapes into lush jungles, highlighting the fragility of human existence (see Figures 10 and 11).



Figure 10. Ellie glimpses the landscape in "The Last of Us". HBO, 2023.



Figure 11. Interactivity enables deeper exploration of landscapes in "The Last of Us". Naughty Dog, 2013.

Cordyceps is now not only transmitted through bites from infected individuals or spores, but also through an interconnected underground mycelial network, which allows communication between infected areas (see Figures 12 and 13).



Figure 12. Spores require the use of gas masks in "The Last of Us". Naughty Dog, 2013.



Figure 13. When a zombie dies, the cordyceps react in "The Last of Us". HBO, 2023.

In addition to the fungus and the infected, human behavior, now organized into hostile factions, represents another danger in this world. Quarantine zones, controlled by the government authority known as FEDRA, are fortified and strictly guarded areas, where harsh living conditions are imposed, such as scarcity of resources and food rationing. These zones represent an oppressive environment where fear and mistrust dominate social interactions (see Figure 14). This situation generates tensions between survivors and a military control system that resorts to propaganda and repression to maintain order.



Figure 14. Public executions in quarantine zones in "The Last of Us". HBO, 2023.

As conditions worsen, resistance movements emerge challenging the authority of FEDRA. These movements emerged as a testament that the last of us are still fighting for our freedom and dignity, and can be categorized into two subversive groups: the Fireflies, and the Hunters, and groups organized as communities.

The Fireflies are a rebel group opposed to FEDRA control (see Figure 15) and are spread across the map. Their goal is to find a cure for the infection and promote freedom and self-governance for the surviving communities.



Figure 15. Fireflies attacks on the quarantine zone in "The Last of Us". Naughty Dog, 2013.

Conversely, the Hunters are a group of survivors who operate outside of quarantine zones, employing violent and aggressive tactics to loot and control resources. This behavior makes them a threat to both the FEDRA and other survivors (see Figures 16 and 17).



Figure 16. Hunters attack Joel and Ellie in "The Last of Us". Naughty Dog, 2013.



Figure 17. The Hunters liberate the Kansas quarantine zone in "The Last of Us". HBO, 2023.

Finally, communities are groups of survivors who have established settlements and social structures for the purpose of living together and maintaining a sense of normality amidst the chaos. There are both peaceful and hostile communities (see Figures 18 and 19), as well as individuals who choose solitude (see Figure 20).



Figure 18. Joel and Ellie arrive at the peaceful community of Jackson in "The Last of Us". HBO, 2023.



Figure 19. A community of cannibals attacks Ellie in "The Last of Us". Naughty Dog, 2013.



Figure 20. Bill, a lone survivor, sets traps in "The Last of Us". HBO, 2023.

3.2 Subjectivity – Ways of World Viewing

3.2.1 Subjectivity Transmedial

Narrative representations, by their very nature, describe worlds inhabited by characters who possess complex mental lives. These characters not only experience the situations presented to them, but also act as agents within an intricate structure of goals, plans, and motivations. In this context, the concept of subjectivity—in particular, the way in which a character's consciousness is represented—has been the subject of intense discussion in narratology for decades. Three key terms have emerged in this debate: perspective, point of view, and focalization (Thon, 2016, p. 223).

Perspective refers to how the story is presented, determined by the location, personality, and values of the narrator, characters, and other entities within the narrative world. The term point of view is used here interchangeably, indicating that both concepts are used synonymously when referring to the perspective or point of view of the narrator or the narrative. However, perspective can also be defined as the set of internal and external factors, together with the conditions necessary to understand and represent events. Thus, each fictional character in a narrative world theoretically possesses his or her own point of

view and perspective, which reflects how that character's consciousness interacts with the narrative world (Thon, 2016, pp. 223 – 224).

To clarify these concepts, Jens Eder proposes a distinction that makes them easier to understand. The mental perspective refers to how the character's consciousness is linked to the narrative world in which he or she is immersed. The medial perspective refers to how the media employ visual or narrative modes to represent these consciences, while the textual or receptional perspective refers to the relationship between the character's and the narrator's perspectives. Even so, this differentiation does not alter the fact that both perspective and point of view are used to describe the relationship between the characters' consciousness and the narrative world in which they inhabit, as well as the interaction between the characters' consciousness and the narrative form in which they are represented (Thon, 2016, p. 224).

For this reason, Genette introduced the term focalization instead of perspective or point of view, distinguishing between who sees and who speaks, and proposing three types of focalization based on different levels of knowledge. Zero focalization occurs when the narrator knows more than the characters (Narrator > Character); internal focalization implies that the narrator knows the same as a character (Narrator = Character); and external focalization means that the narrator knows less than the character (Narrator < Character). Although this theory represented a great advance, it has been criticized for the lack of clarity in the concepts and the difficulty in defining a general type of focalization without resorting to a detailed analysis of the individual parts of the text (Thon, 2016, pp. 226 – 227).

Mieke Bal reconceptualized focalization by introducing a key distinction between the focalizing subject and the focalized object. The focalizing subject refers to the perceiving entity within the narrative, while the focalized object is that which is perceived by that entity. In the case of internal focalization, this falls exclusively on a character who actively participates in the story, functioning as the focalizing subject. On the other hand, external focalization implies that an anonymous agent, located outside the story, acts as the focalizer. The focalized object can be both perceptible or external, that is, something visible or tangible in the narrative, or imperceptible or internal, when it refers to elements that are not directly observable, such as the character's thoughts or emotions. However, this approach presents a significant problem. It is difficult to clearly distinguish between the focalizing subject and the focalized object in situations where a character's consciousness simultaneously becomes the subject and object of focalization. It is also relevant to note that this approach

is rooted in a literary narratology that tends to limit itself, avoiding seeing beyond (Thon, 2016, pp. 227 – 228).

Edward Branigan expands the concept of focalization to the audiovisual realm, drawing distinctions between non-focalized representation, where the viewer gets to know the characters through their actions and dialogues, in a similar way to how the characters get to know each other; external focalization, which reflects an awareness of the character from an outside perspective; and internal focalization, which is more intimate and subjective, including the character's perceptions, impressions, and deep thoughts. François Jost argues that while focalization is understood as the cognitive point of view adopted in the narrative, with similarities or differences in terms of knowledge, ocularization refers to the relationship between what is shown in a film and what the characters are able to observe. Auricularization, on the other hand, describes what is made audible in the film and what the characters are able to hear. This approach highlights the disconnect between the audiovisual representation and the characters' perception, as well as its link to knowledge, which is particularly valuable for narrative analysis (Thon, 2016, pp. 228 – 230).

The representation of subjectivity has been the subject of extensive debate in literary and cinematic narratology, and efforts have been made to apply the concepts mentioned above to a variety of media. Britta Neitzel discusses three types of representational rules used in contemporary video games and relates them to the three types of focalization proposed by Genette. Objective point of view, also known as god's eye perspective, involves a representation from a spatial position completely external to any character or entity within the game space, which can be interpreted as a form of zero focalization, where the knowledge of the narrator or the camera is not limited. The semi-subjective point of view, or third-person perspective, on the other hand, connects the representation to the position of a character or entity without fully coinciding with its location. This approach is comparable to an internal focalization, as it reflects the knowledge of the character without fully adopting its perspective. Finally, the subjective point of view, or first-person perspective, where the representation directly coincides with the spatial position of the character or entity, is associated with an external focalization, since it does not completely represent the body of the character controlled by the player (Thon, 2016, p. 234).

In this context, there is variability in the way subjectivity is represented, making the terms perspective, point of view and focalization subject to multiple moldings depending on the type of medium and the representational rules it employs. Hence, it is optimal to adopt more precise and neutral terms such as representation of subjectivity and subjective

representation, establishing a clearer and more functional theoretical framework to analyze narratives, especially in the transmedia context. Thus, the representation of subjectivity is considered a fundamental characteristic of narratives, since it alludes to the indirect ways through which the characters' mental processes are manifested. This modality does not offer direct access to their thoughts, emotions or perceptions; rather, it allows recipients to infer these aspects through the actions, dialogues and other narrative clues provided. On the other hand, subjective representation involves specific strategies that facilitate direct access to the character's mind, allowing recipients to observe their mental state (Thon, 2016, p. 238).

Mental states can be classified into two main categories: intentional and non-intentional, as well as conscious and non-conscious. In the field of philosophy of mind, intentionality refers to the various ways in which the mind can be directed toward, related to, or referred to objects and states of affairs in the world. It is important to note that not all conscious states are intentional, nor are all intentional states conscious. In general, most conscious phenomena represent direct objects in our environment. However, our minds are also capable of experiencing non-intentional conscious states, such as anxiety or euphoria. Likewise, we can harbor beliefs, desires, hopes, and fears, which constitute unconscious but intentional mental states (Thon, 2016, p. 243).

The core of the way in which the subjective consciousness of characters represented in different contemporary media is through conscious and intentional mental states, referencing the experiences, thoughts and emotions that these characters have actively and deliberately, reflecting their intentions and motivations in the context of the narrative. Therefore, understanding a given narrative representation requires considering not only the content that is represented internally, but also the way in which said representation is carried out. In this sense, the mode of representation becomes even more crucial. To further differentiate the modes, it is useful to examine the mental perspective, understood as the specific way in which intentional objects manifest in consciousness, distinguishing five modes of intentional mental states according to Jens Eder (Thon, 2016, p. 244).

First, the perceptual perspective focuses on how the figure experiences or imagines the object in a similar way to direct perception. Then, from an epistemic perspective, the knowledge or beliefs that the figure has about the object are considered. Third, the evaluative perspective analyzes how the figure makes judgments based on aspects such as aesthetics, morality, or various criteria. The motivational perspective, on the other hand, examines the desires or intentions that the figure has in relation to the object. Finally, the

emotional perspective focuses on the emotions, feelings, or moods that the figure experiences towards this object (Thon, 2016, p. 244). These five perspectives offer a more precise distinction in the representation of subjectivity in contemporary media, by not limiting themselves to conscious states, but also including perceptual or quasi-perceptual ones. This is achieved by evoking mental images that appear in the form of hallucinations, memories, dreams or fantasies, based on the knowledge, beliefs, norms, values, desires, motivations, emotions and moods of the figure (Thon, 2016, pp. 245-246, 248).

Dorrit Cohn introduces a distinction between four key concepts of narrative strategies of subjective representation. Although these concepts are developed specifically in the literary field, they require certain adaptations for their application in other media. Nevertheless, their sophistication represents a significant advance in the study of subjectivity. Psycho-narration is the most complex, as it encompasses all the ways in which the narrator describes the mental life of a character, using exclusively his or her own words. This category differs from narrated interior monologue, where the character's mental speech appears in the form of narrative speech, pretending to be his or her thoughts but being mediated by the narrator. On the other hand, quoted interior monologue consists of an interior monologue quoted explicitly or implicitly by the narrative voice, which continues to refer to the character in the third person. Finally, autonomous interior monologue is presented as a first-person speech, apparently generated autonomously by the character himself or herself, which makes it a limiting case of first-person narration (Thon, 2016, p. 252).

In order to distinguish between a transmedial and a novel-specific conceptualization, slightly different terms will be used to refer to the concepts developed by Cohn. First, the narratorial representation of a character's mind includes all the strategies associated with psycho-narration that depict a character's internal world, incorporating aspects such as memories, dreams, fantasies, beliefs, norms, values, desires, emotions, and motivations. Second, the narratorial representation of a character's (quasi-)perceptions refers to the character's perceptions that are linked, at least in part, to the factual domain of the narrative world in which he or she is situated. Third, the narratorially framed representation of a character's internal voice resembles the (self-)quoted interior monologue and refers to the representation of a character's internal speech, framed by the narrative voice; however, this voice is often not explicitly indicated as a quotation, which complicates its identification. Finally, the nonnarratorial representation of a character's internal voice, which is related to the autonomous interior monologue, involves the unmediated representation of the character's internal voice, which may manifest itself more locally and not necessarily within

a narrative frame. This form of representation can sometimes constitute a narrative strategy in itself, although it is not always considered part of narratorial representation, raising questions about what other nonnarrative strategies contemporary media employ for subjective representation (Thon, 2016, pp. 255–256).

Audiovisual productions have explored both the representation of subjectivity and the pictorial strategies for it. Edward Branigan offers a compelling terminology to describe these strategies, distinguishing between six forms of subjectivity: reflection, point of view (POV), perception, projection, flashback and mental process. Of these six, four can be considered audiovisual or pictorial strategies of subjective representation: process, POV, perception and projection. These strategies possess, in part, medium-specific markers of subjectivity that communicate the subjective nature of the segments represented, such as superimpositions, titles, slow motion, rotating images, intercuts, lighting or color. From this basis, George Wilson developed four audiovisual/pictorial strategies of subjective representation: point-of-view shots, subjectively inflected point-of-view shots (corresponding to Branigan's perception shots), subjectively inflected personal shots (in line with Branigan's projection) and subjectively saturated shots (which include both flashback and mental process). However, the question remains open as to how these audiovisual or pictorial strategies of subjective representation can be adequately conceptualized within a transmedia context (Thon, 2016, pp. 257–258).

In film theory, what is commonly referred to as a point-of-view shot can be redefined in a transmedia context as narrative segments in which storyworlds are visually represented from the spatial position of a character, thereby offering his or her visual perspective. The (quasi-)perceptual point-of-view sequence, described by Branigan as a perception shot and by Wilson as a subjectively inflected point-of-view shot, not only reflects the spatial location of the character, but also subjective (quasi-)perceptual aspects of his or her consciousness, resulting in a representation of the narrative world seen exclusively through his or her internal perspective. Thus, while the point-of-view shot is contextually determined, the perception shot traditionally uses additional representational markers – such as filters, blurs, or altered colors – to communicate the perceptual qualities of what is presented. Finally, the (quasi-)perceptual overlay, corresponding to Branigan's projection and Wilson's subjectively inflected impersonal shots, does not necessarily reflect the character's spatial position, but represents other (quasi-)perceptual aspects of his consciousness, creating a private domain of his mind that is clearly signaled by visual markers linked to the content represented (Thon, 2016, pp. 259 – 261).

To summarize this shifting theoretical framework of subjectivity, it is worth noting that subjectivity can be understood as a nuanced interaction between characters' inner lives and the narrative structures that encapsulate them. Representations of mental states not only reveal how characters perceive and interact with their worlds, but also invite a deeper understanding of their motivations and emotions. This concept expands into a multimodal perspective, in which different modes of representation work together to convey subjective experiences. Ultimately, this integration enriches the narrative, fostering an immersive environment that allows for the reconstruction and connection with characters' inner realities across diverse formats and contexts.

3.2.2 Subjectivity Multimodal

The concept of a storyworld includes a variety of elements, among which characters are central. These characters reside in the narrative universe and possess, without a doubt, a subjective world or mental life. The narrative develops at the intersection of these two worlds: while the storyworld provides the narrative structure and the events that drive the plot, the subjective world determines how each character perceives and interacts with these events. This dynamic, in turn, influences the way in which the reader perceives and understands the narrative universe as a whole.

Visual and narrative media employ a variety of techniques to represent a character's consciousness, providing access to his or her mental states, including perceptions, knowledge, judgments, motivations, and emotions. These strategies include point-of-view shots, textual markers such as internal monologues, and medium-specific tools such as filters and effects. By using these devices, the audience is allowed to distinguish between the audiovisual representation of events and the character's subjective perception, thereby offering deeper insight into his or her internal experience.

Recipients experience and process the disconnect between what is depicted in the narrative and what the characters perceive, either through their own eyes or from an external perspective. Through this experience, they learn not only about the narrative world, but also about themselves, integrating their knowledge, beliefs, norms, values, desires, motivations, emotions, and moods. This process manifests itself in the experience of their mental states through hallucinations, memories, dreams, and fantasies.

In this way, a link is established between audiovisual representations and perceptions, participating actively, for example, by controlling a character, or passively, by immersing oneself in the psychology of that character. Through this process, the mental states of the

characters are interpreted, inferring their interiority through narrative clues, such as dialogues and actions.

These mental states allude to the experiences, thoughts, emotions, intentions and motivations of the characters, referencing their individual internal world. Despite this, they transcend the private by connecting with the fictional narrative universe, to which the characters' consciences and perceptions make reference. These mental states also establish a link with the real world, projecting and resonating with the reality of the receivers in the representation of subjectivity.

3.2.3 Subjectivity Construction in “The Last of Us”

The representation of subjectivity in “The Last of Us” focuses primarily on the internal experience of its characters, especially in the figure of Joel. This narrative explores in depth how his trauma, emotions and moral evolution intertwine throughout the story. To understand this process in a comprehensive way, it is essential to analyze Joel's subjective dimension, investigating the roots of his trauma and its influence on the development of the plot.

Joel lived in Austin, Texas, with his daughter Sarah, acting as a regular father who managed to balance his work dedication with his paternal commitment (see Figure 21). His character was defined by a deep caring and responsibility, complemented by a relaxed temperament that reflected his love and devotion to her.



Figure 21. Joel and Ellie have breakfast in “The Last of Us”. HBO, 2023.

Outbreak Day coincides with Joel's birthday, and he receives a touching gift from his daughter: a repaired watch, a symbol of their family connection (see Figure 22). As events unfold and the chaos escalates, Joel struggles to protect Sarah, but his ability to grasp the magnitude of the situation they face is limited (see Figure 23).

Together with her brother Tommy, they attempt to escape the city by getting into a car in an act of desperation (see Figure 24). However, during the journey, they suffer an accident that leaves Sarah with a disabled ankle, exposing them to the horrors of the apocalypse (see Figure 25).



Figure 22. Sarah gives the watch to Joel in "The Last of Us". Naughty Dog, 2013.



Figure 23. Joel protects Sarah from a zombie in "The Last of Us". Naughty Dog, 2013.



Figure 24. Joel, Tommy and Sarah escape in a truck in "The Last of Us". Naughty Dog, 2013.



Figure 25. Sarah suffering from the accident in "The Last of Us". HBO, 2023.

In the face of this critical situation, Tommy stays behind and Joel moves forward with Sarah in his arms, dodging obstacles and evading the zombies. Just when they are about to be hit, a soldier intervenes and eliminates them (see Figure 26).



Figure 26. Zombie shot down in "The Last of Us". HBO, 2023.

Upon encountering civilians outside the perimeter, the soldier requests instructions and is ordered to eliminate them (see Figure 27). Just as he prepares to shoot and finish off the individuals, Tommy intervenes and kills the soldier. Although Joel was not injured in this confrontation, the bullets fired tragically caused Sarah's death (see Figure 28).



Figure 27. Military receiving execution orders in "The Last of Us". Naughty Dog, 2013.



Figure 28. Joel grieving the death of his daughter in "The Last of Us". HBO, 2023.

3.3 Multimodal Entanglement – Ways of World Structuring

3.3.1 Comparative Analysis of Storyworlds in "The Last of Us"

In order to conduct a coherent comparison of multimodal entanglement in transmedia representations of storyworlds, it is essential to select scenes that are comparable across both media. In this regard, the first scene following the events of Outbreak Day is particularly significant, as it powerfully illustrates how the world has changed in the twenty years since. This sequence not only provides the necessary context for understanding the development of the narrative, but also establishes a crucial starting point for the story. Its inclusion is therefore essential in this comparative analysis.

In the video game, the first scene introduces a visibly worn-out Joel in a gloomy, run-down room (see Figure 29). He is visited by Tess, his friend and partner in illicit activities, who mentions having been assaulted by a group of bandits led by Robert, an arms smuggler. This motivates them to devise a plan to confront him. They leave the apartment and the surroundings are revealed to be a decaying urban landscape (see Figure 30).

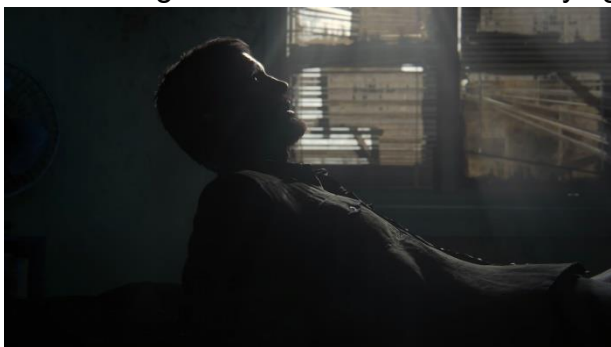


Figure 29. Joel waking up from a nightmare in "The Last of Us". Naughty Dog, 2013.



Figure 30. The facade of Joel's apartment in "The Last of Us". Naughty Dog, 2013.

As they make their way through the alleys, the sounds of families living in the surrounding buildings suggest a fragile existence amidst chaos. Upon reaching the main street, the military presence and heightened security contrast with the devastation of the landscape. The rumblings of vehicles and military raids interrupt the ambient echoes, immersing the player in an oppressive, post-apocalyptic atmosphere of a quarantine zone. On the walls of the alley, FEDRA signs indicate that the area is under their control, while a sign on the main street displays the hours of the curfew. The megaphone message reinforces the oppression (see Figure 31 and 32).



Figure 31. First view of the quarantine zone in "The Last of Us". Naughty Dog, 2013.



Figure 32. Landscape in contrast to the quarantine zone in "The Last of Us". Naughty Dog, 2013.

In the TV series, this scene is introduced in reverse compared to the video game. A homeless child slowly makes his way through the ruins towards the Boston Quarantine Zone (see Figure 33), a highly reinforced place controlled by strict security measures. Upon entering the zone, the deteriorating buildings and dirty streets reflect the decay of the surroundings, while the FEDRA signs, visible on every corner, evidence the oppressive control they exert over the population (see Figure 34). The public execution of offenders further underlines the atmosphere of repression and fear in which people live (see Figure 35). In addition, the Fireflies, an insurgent group, are also presented as a threat in this setting, as people are seen painting over their logo, symbolizing the latent conflict (see



Figure 33. Child arriving at Boston quarantine zone in "The Last of Us". HBO, 2023.



Figure 34. Posters posted by FEDRA in "The Last of Us". HBO, 2023.

Figure 36). The music, beyond the ambient sounds, adds an emotional layer that intensifies the melancholic and somber tone of the world.



Figure 35. Authorities directing a public execution in "The Last of Us". HBO, 2023.



Figure 36. Workers covering the Fireflies logo in "The Last of Us". HBO, 2023.

The visual and textual modes in the game contribute to a bleak, run-down atmosphere that establishes a sense of hopelessness. The details and colors present in the quarantine room and zone allow the player to sense the desolation, preparing them for the narrative that unfolds next. Likewise, the auditory modes heighten the experience, making it easier for the player to feel the precariousness of life in Joel's environment. Similarly, in the series, these same modes represent ruin and desolation, evoking an emotional response in the viewer, who grasps the injustice and brutality that characterizes that society. In this context, the sign represented by the Fireflies suggests a possible clue to the narrative development. The soundtrack, composed by Gustavo Santaolalla, stands as an emotional commentary that deepens the perception of the state of the world, creating a more intimate bond between the viewer and the narrative environment.

The player's ability to explore different spaces and objects encourages active participation in the narrative. Details discovered require the player to engage in order to understand the story, forming personal connections to the storyworld. Although the series does not offer the same level of interactivity, the viewer is required to pay attention to visual and audio details, creating meaning through their observation, allowing them to piece the narrative together as the plot progresses.

The depiction of violence and decay in Joel's environment in both media evokes contemporary themes related to social conflicts and humanitarian crises. Symbols of oppression and resistance are immediately recognizable, allowing the viewer to connect these references to the narrative, creating a credible and coherent fictional world. This process enriches the narrative experience and offers the opportunity to use the acquired clues for future interpretations.

This multimodal entanglement, designed to construct the meaning of the sequence of scenes, allows us to identify a first narrative cue developed from four perspectives that contribute integrally to the whole.

3.3.2 Comparative Analysis of Subjectivity in “The Last of Us”

Joel's trauma is a central element of the narrative that extends throughout the story and for its analysis it is essential to select its representations from both media. After the death of his daughter, Joel becomes cold, distant, distrustful and violent, but the relationship he has with Ellie throughout the story causes this to transform, thus leading him to break down the emotional barrier he built.

The video game uses facial expressions and body language to delineate Joel's characteristics. During his first meeting with Ellie, the character is presented as distant and tense, with his arms crossed, a cautious tone of voice, and short, clipped dialogue (see Figure 37).



Figure 37. First meeting between Joel and Ellie in “The Last of Us”. Naughty Dog, 2013.

This representation is similarly reflected in the series, where the acting is enhanced through camera angles and the use of subjectively saturated shots, such as flashbacks. These narratorial representations of a character's mind and (quasi-)perceptions provide a glimpse into Joel's consciousness and trauma, offering a deeper understanding of his emotional state. Furthermore, the sound effects in these flashbacks provide context, underlining that such moments are taking place in his mind and thus enriching the viewer's experience (see 38, 39 and 40).



Figure 38. Joel protecting Ellie from a soldier in "The Last of Us". HBO, 2023.



Figure 39. Flashback overlay to Sarah's death in "The Last of Us". HBO, 2023.



Figure 40. Joel reacting to the situation, beating the soldier to death in "The Last of Us". HBO, 2023.

Joel's portrayal through his facial expressions and body language allows the player to sense his emotional state. The tension in his gestures suggests discomfort and uncertainty during the encounter. Likewise, his lines, short and cautious, reflect the emotional barrier he has built to protect himself from exposure. In the series, camera angles are strategically used to direct the viewer's attention to significant details in Pedro Pascal's performance. Flashbacks, meanwhile, add layers to the understanding of his mental state, revealing past traumas that still affect him. Combined with carefully crafted sound effects, these elements create the feeling that the viewer is directly accessing Joel's mind, intensifying the emotional experience.

In the video game, controlling Joel from a third-person perspective establishes a deeper connection between the player and the character. This relationship goes beyond simply observing the scene through cut-scenes; the player actively participates through scripted events. In contrast, the series lacks control over the action, but the way Joel's emotions are presented through acting and flashbacks allows for significant emotional immersion. This connects the viewer to the main character's story and pain, making them feel part of the dynamic between Joel and Ellie.

Hence, Sarah's death becomes a reference point in both versions of the story. Joel's expressions and actions evoke in the player other experiences of trauma and loss, facilitating a deeper understanding of his character and motivations. Flashbacks provide a referential context that not only helps the viewer understand Joel's trauma, but also reveals how his past influences his present behavior. In addition, universal emotions such as loss and mistrust allow the viewer to relate their own life to the narrative, fostering a deeper connection with the character, his mental state, and therefore with the storyworld.

4. CONCLUSION

The methodology applied in this analysis provides an optimal granularity to address transmedia concepts, thus facilitating the identification of key elements in the construction of narrative worlds and in the understanding of subjectivity. This approach breaks down, on the one hand, the mental representation of concepts and, on the other, the medial representation, which allows to reveal the dynamics of perception, participation and reference of the receivers throughout the narrative process. In this way, a general but also specific overview is offered by examining how the different modes construct narrative tracks, understood as happenings represented in a sequence of scenes, enabling a better understanding of the complexity of the concept of storyworld and the variability in the representation of subjectivity in various media.

The narrative clues collected allow us to observe how the narrative world of “The Last of Us” and Joel's trauma are constructed and represented in both media, each of which provides an additional layer of meaning through its own strategies. In this sense, it can be said that “The Last of Us” constitutes an adaptation with transmedia nuances, since both formats represent the same narrative world, but each medium contributes to its expansion or adds a new perspective. The video game immerses the player in a sensory experience conditioned by the progress of the story and the player's participation in it, allowing interaction with the environment. In contrast, the television series uses these modes in a more controlled, structured and artistic way, taking advantage of resources such as cinematography, editing and sound (Thon, 2016, p. 75) to express both the development of the plot and the evolution of the characters. The interaction between the different layers of meaning allows the plot to be fully enjoyed, regardless of the medium through which it is accessed. Each format offers a complete experience in itself, but at the same time, the interrelation between the two enriches the understanding of the narrative universe and its characters. Thus, those who approach both the video game and the series can capture greater depth, while those who only consume one of the media still access a coherent and satisfying narrative.

4.1 Methodological Implication for Analysis

This methodological tool developed in this bachelor thesis proposes an integrative approach that contemplates multiple modes of representation, in order to achieve a more complete understanding of contemporary narratives. Through four key perspectives, it seeks to

capture multimodal complexity, understand emotional experience, recognize the participation of the receiver and explore existing connections.

The model can be applied both for the comparison of transmedia structures and for inter- and intramedial approaches. It is also useful in content creation and in any field that involves the interaction of different modes of representation or construction of meaning. Its use can be deepened by having experts in the area of application, which, at certain times, can add a level of complexity. Therefore, it is essential to manage it appropriately.

4.2 Practical Implications for Game Design

The findings from this analysis have significant implications for creating better gaming experiences. Using it facilitates understanding of meaning generation, showing that careful integration of these modes can enhance player immersion in the game environment. The combination of multimodal representation, character subjectivity, and active player engagement in the narrative can lead to deeper, more emotionally resonant experiences. Designers who adopt this strategy can optimize the connection between the player and the narrative world, thereby satisfying multiple channels and thereby enhancing narrative satisfaction.

This tool is equally valuable for creators who wish to expand or adapt a universe, as it allows them to identify the right variables for a coherent and successful expansion or adaptation.

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