



Screen Time

Artistic Networked Chronotopes

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Abstract

This article examines contemporary artists' appropriation of social media platforms to explore new narrative forms. In addition to the aesthetic and thematic qualities of these works, artists' social media narratives reveal pragmatic and discursive qualities, notably unique space-time configurations. Artists such as Molly Soda, Amalia Ulman, Martine Gutierrez, or even the design team Brud's Instagram CGI character Lil Miquela, highlight the temporal and spatial narrative dimensions of social media designs and the ways these platforms facilitate, guide, and frame self-representation and storytelling. This article will explore the ways in which narrative elements are both integrated into the design of social media platforms and reappropriated artistically for critical or reflexive use, (re)constructing the intentions and potentials of both the technology and the narrative concepts. This reflection draws on literary discourse theory as well as digital narratology and socio-linguistics, specifically employing French philosopher Paul Ricœur's concept of narrative identity and emplotment as well as Russian structuralist Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of chronotope (Greek for "time-space"). Through this analysis, we interpret artistic social media practices as self-narratives that employ medium-specific temporal configurations and challenge the traditional narrative framework.

Résumé

Cet article examine l'appropriation des plateformes de réseaux sociaux par les artistes contemporains pour explorer de nouvelles pratiques narratives. Outre les qualités esthétiques et thématiques de ces œuvres, les récits des artistes sur les réseaux sociaux révèlent des qualités pragmatiques et discursives, notamment des configurations spatio-temporelles uniques. Des artistes comme Molly Soda, Amalia Ulman, Martine Gutierrez, ou même le personnage 3D Lil Miquela de l'agence de design Brud sur Instagram, mettent en lumière les dimensions spatiotemporelles du design des réseaux sociaux. Elles révèlent la manière dont ces plateformes facilitent, guident et encadrent la représentation de soi et le récit. Cet article explore les manières dont des éléments narratifs sont à la fois intégrés dans la conception des plateformes de réseaux sociaux et réappropriés artistiquement pour un usage critique ou réflexif, (re)construisant les intentions et les potentiels à la fois de ces technologies et des concepts narratifs. Cette réflexion s'appuie sur la théorie du discours littéraire ainsi que sur

la narratologie numérique et la sociolinguistique, en mobilisant spécifiquement trois concepts; ceux d'identité narrative et de mise-en-intrigue du philosophe français Paul Ricœur ainsi que la théorie du chronotope (« espace-temps » en grec) du structuraliste russe Mikhail Bakhtin. Par cette analyse, nous interprétons les pratiques artistiques sur les réseaux sociaux comme des récits de soi qui emploient des configurations temporelles spécifiques au médium et remettent en question le cadre narratif traditionnel.

Keywords: Literary speech, Hypertext, Gender, Identity, Media, Narrative, Reflexive, Selfie, Social media, Artistic and literary depictions of body and space, Bakhtin

Mot-clés : Discours littéraire, Hypertexte, Genre, Identité, Médias, Récit, Réflexivité, Selfie, Représentations artistiques et littéraires du corps et de l'espace, Réseaux sociaux, Bakhtine

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Introduction

In 2011 Facebook rolled out a new user profile layout named “Timeline”, transforming the user profile page into a “glorious two-column scrapbook documenting every facet of your digital life” (Houston 2011), in chronological order. This feature, developed by designer Nicholas Felton, offers a visual history of every aspect of a user’s activity on the site over time. As described by Mark Zuckerberg at the F8 developer conference in 2011, the Timeline is a way to “share the story of your life on a single page” (Schulman 2011). Following Facebook’s “Timeline”, SnapChat introduced the “My Story” feature in 2013 which allows users to create multiple 10 second videos that are only visible for 24 hours (Snapchat has since increased the time of each video to 60 seconds). This feature was then essentially copied by Instagram, which released the “Stories” function in 2016. Since then, there has been an increasing number of social media titles that refer to time and narrative, and even one of the newest and extraordinarily successful apps, TikTok, takes its name from the onomatopoeia associated with clocks and countdowns, *tick-tock*.

Recognizing this patterned temporal theme, I began to take notice of the developing relationships between time and narrative on social media platforms. Rather than offering a sociological, psychological, or technical overview of the intricacies of social networks and individuals’ experience of time, I am interested in examining contemporary artists’ adoption of social media to explore this unique interrelation.

I will explore the pragmatic and discursive aspects of new media art taking place on social networks, regarding the unique space-time configurations artistic social media narratives reveal. Among contemporary artists who use

social media as a medium for artistic expression, I will focus on practices in which the artist is the primary subject of their work (*autodiegetic* narrator), and maintains a consistent social media presence over multiple years. Artists such as Molly Soda and Amalia Ulman, Martine Gutierrez, or even the design team Brud’s Instagram cyborg *Lil Miquela*, highlight the temporal and spatial narrative dimensions of social media designs and the ways these platforms facilitate, guide, and frame self-representation and storytelling.

Here I will discuss the ways in which narrative elements are both integrated into the design of social media platforms (Gentès 2007) and reappropriated artistically for critical or reflexive use, (re)constructing the intentions and potentials of both the technology and the narrative concepts. This reflection draws on literary discourse theory (Genette, Bakhtin, Collington) as well as digital narratology (N. Katherine Hayles, Ruth Page, Marie-Laure Ryan) and socio-linguistics (Blommaert, De Fina). Applying Paul Ricœur’s concept of *narrative identity* and *emplotment* in order to link storytelling mechanisms to the construction of self, as well as Mikhail Bakhtin’s theory of *chronotope* (Greek for “time-space”), I will examine how artistic social media practices can be interpreted as self-narratives and how these works challenge the traditional narrative framework. I propose that self-representation on social media is a form of self-emplotment that takes place in unique time-space configurations, allowing the artist to reflect on their networked identity. By applying these discursive and theoretical concepts to a medium-specific study of contemporary artists, we can investigate the existing temporal and spatial configurations afforded by social media and the ways in which artists are redefining these narrative concepts.

Methodology

For this study of artistic uses of networked narrative techniques, I chose to specifically access the artists’ work through Instagram. I selected this platform because of the ability to view and capture multiple images comfortably in the grid formation and the ease of storing relevant posts to my personal account, using the archive function. There is of course the risk that a post or caption gets deleted or edited, even once “archived”, but that is the risk with all social media works that are not externally archived. The layout of Instagram nonetheless allows for the most fluid viewing of what I want to analyze as a visual expression of a narrative identity.

It is important to emphasize that the selection of artists included in this article is intentionally restricted. While defining the pool of potential artistic narrative expression on social media is a fascinating topic in its own right, I chose to limit my study to artists that are both recognized in the institutional art world, presenting work in galleries, museums and digital exhibitions, and are also active contributors to social media networks with a significant following. As I am interested in exploring the temporal aspects of social network narratives, these artists' prolificacy, visibility, and timeframes provide excellent examples for this study. More precisely, artists' profiles will be examined first by briefly describing the works and analyzing the symbolic references, before reassessing the pragmatic and discursive aspects.

I chose to examine two primary examples in which the artists highlight the chronotopic norms of social media by either conforming to the expected narrative archetype, such as in Amalia Ulman's works *Excellences & Perfections*, or by manipulating the platforms' existing chronotopic narrative structures, as reflected by artists Molly Soda and Martine Guterrez's work.

Narrative Dimensions

Materiality

As literary scholar Marie-Laure Ryan has posited, the term "narrative" is now associated with a vast array of meanings and applications, from capitalized history (Lyotard), cultural, class, or race identities, to software interface (Abbe Don) and company branding strategies (Ryan 2006). Therefore, I will be employing a definition born out of the narratological tradition. I propose to use H. Porter Abbott's definition as presented in the glossary of *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative*, which defines narrative as: "The representation of a story (an event or series of events) [...] Narratives consist of two main components: the story and the narrative discourse." (2020, 237–38)

Building on the digital narratological tradition, which has historically focused on fictional texts and artwork (digital fiction), or political contexts, I continue in the vein of recent theorists (Ruth Page, Bronwen Thomas) pushing to include new forms of artistic digital storytelling found on blogs, networking sites, or social media (Ruth E. Page and Thomas 2011). Contemporary literary theorists have embraced the intrinsic role media now plays in storytelling and have geared their research toward examining these causal

relationships. For example, scholar N. Katherine Hayles documented how hypertext links of the 1980s gave rise to a new form of interactive digital narrative. Hypertext fictions such as Shelley Jackson's *Patchwork Girl* (1995) or Stuart Moulthrop's *Victory Garden* (1992), allow readers to participate in the development and structure of the narrative via the links they chose to click on. While these works are limited to primarily textual representations with a pool of potential plot lines that can be assembled by the reader, they represent extreme variations of the narrative structure (Ruth E. Page and Thomas 2011). Since then, the popularity of Web 2.0 has enabled a much wider variety of accessible digital manipulations combining image and text bringing on what Hayles describes as the second wave of digital fiction (Hayles 2002).

As argued by Hayles, we must now take into consideration narrative materiality, or the correlation between a narrative's physical characteristics and signifying strategies (Hayles 2004). For example, social network platforms have distinct affordances (physical characteristics), and corresponding behavioral norms and userships (signifying strategies). This is in part due to the technical possibilities within each platform's design, such as the 15 second limit per video in an Instagram Story or Twitter's 140-character limit, as well as the "cultural expectations that develop as users socially construct the spaces" (Papacharissi 2018, 12). Within the broader study of computer-mediated communication, theorists such as Ruth Page have delineated social media discourse by some of the distinctive characteristics associated with the platforms. Page outlines key factors to be:

collaborative potential (the opportunity for narrators to interact with a networked audience), their episodic formats (the distribution of textual fragments as posts or updates within an archive), and their tendency to prioritize recency over retrospection (through the use of timelines and reverse-chronological ordering). (2013)

This distinction once again highlights the intrinsic relationship between time and space in social media narratives.

Headings

As these “spaces” have become central to societal interaction, there is increasing scholarship surrounding the developing behavioral norms associated with various social media platforms. While studies in the fields of psychology and anthropology mainly examine the emerging behavioral trends (Ross 2019), we can look to the Structuralist approach, for tools for further discursive analysis. As previously mentioned, I am interested in a narratological analysis that is not limited by particular media or discipline, and will therefore draw on concepts that can be applied to digital media beyond the literary canon. Literary theorist Gérard Genette presents a taxonomy for the presentation of narrative under multiple headings, including mode, narrative instance, level and time (Genette 1972). Specifically, we can consider Genette’s theories around narrative time for a more nuanced analysis of the perspective, distance and frequency of narrative which can be applied to the study of the “narrating” that takes place on social media.

Additionally, exploring discussions around genre, we can reference Genette’s concept of *architext*, which addresses how particular narrative cues can structure interpretation. As explained by theorist Annie Gentes:

Speaking of genres is a way to constitute a field, and its boundaries and therefore to signal how to trespass. The reader and spectator mobilize their knowledge of codes and literacies to understand the work of art, only to be destabilized in their expectations by the defaults of this archetype. (2019, 51)

Abstracting this concept from the literary context, we will later discuss how certain contemporary artists are aware of these archetypal social media narratives, and chose to either conform to or betray these semiotic/structures/norms. These interpretations link narrative analysis to identity construction, enabling the exploration of the existing time-space configurations in social media and the artistic response to the patterned social behavior associated.

Self-Emplotment

Following these discursive and narratological theories, we can draw a link to concepts of the self in order to arrive at networked self-narratives. To rejoin Bakhtin’s theory of chronotope and continue this investigation of narrative

timeframes, we can integrate philosopher Paul Ricœur's hermeneutics of narrative and identity. In his book *Time and Narrative (Temps et Récit)*, Ricœur proposes the narrative model as a solution to the human temporal framework, or the different ways in which we experience time. According to Ricœur there are two types of identity in relation to time; the *Idem Identity* or *sameness* ("mêmeté"), that which persists unchanged over time, and *Ipsé Identity* or *ipseity* ("ipséité"), selfhood across and through change. Selfhood involves both poles, and it is narrative identity that unites the dimensions of *idem* and *ipse* in a dialectical relationship. Ricœur offers the concept of *emplotment* ("mise-en-intrigue") as the mediating function that allows an individual to configure the various events, agents or objects encountered into a meaningful narrative over time (Ricœur 1985). Responding to particular temporal situations, individuals can therefore constitute themselves in a story of the self in order to construct a reciprocal identity.

Although it is argued that Ricœur does not make a clear reference to space in his analysis (Collington 2001), the philosopher does mention the importance of point of view or narrative perspective. In that, narrative events must always be told from a particular perspective (space). It is worth noting that although Ricœur did make reference to Bakhtin's work, translated into French just a few years prior (1978), the philosopher did not explicitly mention Bakhtin's discussion of chronotope. Nonetheless, we can clearly recognize the parallels between Ricœur and Bakhtin's theories of temporal configuration and the relationship with identity construction. Reflecting on these various discursive, literary, and philosophical theories in the context of social media, I propose that the particular time-space dimensions of networked platforms correspond to generic social norms that in turn inform the stories and identities produced there. Beyond the potential of these spaces to act as imaginary territories (Merzeau 2018), I would like to argue that certain artists engage in methods of self-emplotment, highlighting and challenging the various social time-space norms (chronotopes) of networked media narratives.

Networked Narrative

In April of 2014, Argentinian artist Amalia Ulman launched the project *Excellences & Perfections*, a six-month long performance on her Instagram and Facebook accounts. The project consisted of the staging of a social me-

dia account where through her posts, Ulman fabricated a fictional character as performance art. The performance unfolded by presenting three different personalities characteristic of popular social media accounts, the roles of “cute girl”, “sugar baby” and “life goddess”. Ulman was quoted explaining this choice stating “they seemed to be the most popular trends online (for women)” (Kinsey 2016). She documented the evolution of a pretty, innocent young girl who, upon moving to a big city, is transformed by the stereotypes of the superficial, consumerist, hyper-sexualized life. Her behavior becomes increasingly reckless, until eventually she suffers an emotional breakdown, and ultimately has an epiphany and finds redemption in pursuing a healthy and enlightened life. Each stage is depicted by the performance of behaviors corresponding to each caricature. Eventually, after amassing almost 100,000 followers, Ulman revealed her behavior on the platform to be a performance art piece.

The sharing of such personal emotional and mental turmoil has arguably become a trend for engagement on social media and the internet (Tolentino 2019). Ulman has in fact stated that she was inspired by the reaction to actress Amanda Bynes’ public and professional meltdown “replicating a narrative of breakdown, apology and rescue that fuels an economy of likes and shares” (Kinsey 2016). Ulman’s work reflected this pattern of public portrayal of female suffering through the evolution of her narrative tropes. Ulman’s embodiment of stereotypical feminine personae raises poignant social-cultural criticism of female representation and the malleability of identity on social media and has garnered significant attention and theoretical reflection in the art world and academic sphere. Yet, here, I am interested in exploring the discursive narrative strategies employed in her work, which we will shortly discuss.

Molly Soda is another artist who has gained recognition for her unconventional uses of social media platforms since the early 2010s. She is also one of the first digital artists to produce works comprised of web-based performances across social media platforms including Facebook, Tumblr, Twitter, YouTube and Instagram. Soda has consistently adapted to include emerging networks and preserved her profiles more or less intact for over a decade. Her Instagram use incorporates various aspects of her artistic expression and personal life. Her posts show mundane daily activities, reference special occasions and deeply intimate scenes. The images shared are mainly selfies taken at arm’s length or from her computer, often featuring new VR filters (elf ears

and freckles) or scattered with outdated internet graphics (the iconic Pixel Dollz), as well as images of her other digital works. Although Soda does not directly define her social media accounts as works of art, as these platforms are one of the primary mediums and locus of her artwork, I am interested in examining the artist's overall usage of the platform as a potential canvas of expression.

Soda's repetitive posts that often depict images and videos of herself in her bedroom, sometimes using the Photobooth application, or screenshotting her YouTube page, have been described as "oversharing" (Sauerlaender 2021), or "sharing 'too much information' about one's private life or personal details" (Sauerlaender 2021, 129) and correspond to the "camgirl"¹ genre. The term camgirl has had an evolving definition since its first appearance in the late 1990s, and the practice, contested as both potentially objectifying and empowering women (Maguire 2018), inspired new media artists before Soda. In 1997, Ana Voog was one of the first artists to refer to her 24-hour home webcam streaming practice as art, broadcasting daily life tasks and designated performances (Sauerlaender 2021, 119). Ten years later, Petra Cortright's 2007 work *VVEBCAM*, diverged aesthetically from the traditional camgirl trope and intentionally integrated meta data tags often associated with spam to subvert the platform's structure (Net Art Anthology 2016). Soon after, artist Ann Hirsch produced her 18-month long project on YouTube *Scandalishious* (2008-2009), sharing one video a week of herself dancing and interacting with her followers.

Starting around 2010, Soda's YouTube and Vimeo works address the camgirl genre, among wider themes around female online self-representation. While this aspect of her practice invites critical reflection regarding the limits of private and public space, female representation and commodification (Sauerlaender 2021), I would like to argue that, similarly to Ulman's work, the rhythms and settings of Soda's posts highlight the intrinsic connection between time and space in social media narratives.

¹"The term camgirl refers to girls and women who use audiovisual digital media to communicate with public audiences [...] it today more commonly means performers who engage in sexual behavior in front of the camera, usually in real time and often in exchange for financial compensation." (Sadowski 2020).

Discourse

In order to assess the unique temporal and spatial configurations of these works, I employ Bakhtin's theory of chronotope. While this concept was initially conceived in textual and speech specific narrative analysis, I would like to consider it within the context of social media narratives. Bakhtin's theories are of particular interest in the extent to which they equally address the diverse semantic, discursive, and pragmatic narrative dimensions. I will briefly present the relative aspects of the concept before applying it to the artistic expression.

Bakhtin's concept of chronotope argues for "the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature" (M. Bakhtin 1981, 84). Bakhtin presents the chronotope as a critical and heuristic tool through which we can identify temporal and spatial patterns that are associated with particular generic types (Collington 2001). This interdependence between "time-space" and behavior (plot) also informs character or identity and their social, cultural, or political perspectives that become meaningful within the narrative. For example, the Greek romance chronotope differs from that of the common adventure novel, the biography, or the crime mystery. One might be able to recognize the association between a dark alley at night with the crime mystery or the months-long seabound journey with a Greek romance. Each genre has a distinct chronotope that refers to categorical spaces and timing in relation to different historical references, heroic spatial relationships, and narrative worldviews or ideologies.

Notably, according to Bakhtin, chronotopic genres interact with, are informed by, and structure external social realities (M. M. Bakhtin 1981). This analytical potential has made the concept attractive to various contemporary fields, re-theorizing social and political notions, such as normativity and identity, through a chronotopic lens. Theorists Jan Blommaert and Farzad Karimzad argue that these generic chronotopic structures correspond to behavioral norms of identity. Blommaert explains that:

chronotopes involve specific forms of agency, identity: specific patterns of social behavior "belong", so to speak, to particular timespace configurations; and when they "fit" they respond to existing frames of recognizable identity, while when they don't they

are “out of place”, “out of order” or transgressive (see Blommaert (2015) for a discussion.) (2017, 5).

Furthermore, Karimzad argues that what is recognized as “normal behavior” can be seen as a set of chronotopic relations that must correspond to various temporal, spatial, and semiotic interactions (Karimzad 2020, 108).

In the fields of anthropology and sociology, theorists have begun applying chronotopic analysis to social media as a pragmatic tool for assessing the particular cultural, political and sociolinguistic norms that operate in the specific spatial and temporal conditions of social networking environments. Studies such as Ondřej Procházka’s (2018) analysis of a meme page on Facebook or Taraneh Sanei’s (2021) article on a new Iranian orthographic norm on Twitter, examine normative behavioral parameters pertinent to specific chronotopes. These studies emphasize the contextualization of such interactions, in which micro discourse invokes macro conditions, thus creating orders of indexicality.

Referencing the previously mentioned authors and the existing behavioral and semiotic tradition (Mikhail Bakhtin, Roland Barthes, Zygmunt Bauman, Irving Goffman, among others) and applying it to our study of artistic uses of social media and identity construction, we can associate specific Instagram profile “tropes” with certain rhythms and settings. The stereotypical fashion influencer’s profile might share content in luxurious settings; abroad, at a fancy event, or in a hotel, at a regular, often calculated, pace. Whereas, a wellness focused profile may share primarily images in workout spaces, in nature, or testimonial “before and afters”, at more sporadic intervals. These are just two of the most obvious generic account styles that many social media users can recognize, there are countless others, and of course, accounts that may resemble multiple styles or genres. Yet, applying Bakhtin’s theory of chronotope, and the more recent interpretations of the concept, to the analysis of social media narratives, we can begin to identify some of the time-space norms associated with networked narratives. Furthermore, as these social media chronotopic genres are becoming increasingly recognizable, so too have contemporary artists responded to these norms, challenging and underlining the existing generic trends.

Reflexive Narrative: Amalia Ulman

Ulman was apparently aware of these chronotopic genres and social media identity norms and succeeded to replicate them in “an order that could make sense as a narrative” (Kinsey 2016) in order to weave her synthetic narrative into the greater social media fabric. In an effort to adhere to the standard narrative structure, *Excellences & Perfections* in fact follows traditional folktale characteristics and references an Aristotelian dramatic plot structure. One can also extend the analysis to include elements of Freytag’s dramatic structure (Freytag and MacEwan 1894). Ulman’s narrative has a clear introduction (her post on April 19th, 2014 “Part I” announced the start), rise (moving to the big city), climax (her mental breakdown), return (healthy awakening), and catastrophe (revealing the performance and thus abruptly ending the narrative). Another interpretation might also recognize Northrop Frye’s U-shaped structure, with a clearly happy beginning, transformative low middle point, and resolute end (Frye 1982). Following either analysis, Ulman’s narrative evokes the classical dramatic narrative structure, while also adhering to social media’s behavioral norms.

In addition to the recognizable plot arc, Ulman also performed the socially normed paces and rhythms of activity associated with social network media as a whole and more specific distinct platform behavior. Looking at Ulman’s posts we can see that she followed a “realistic” timeframe and “appropriate” rhythm of posts, carefully timing her progression over six months, in order to create a credible story that follows the codes of the platforms. If she had, for example, shared too many images in too quick succession or over-shared right away, her followers may have suspected artificiality, inappropriate usage or simply not registered her persona as the intended stereotype: an aspiring it-girl (Ruigrok, Sophie 2018). As previously mentioned, I argue that there are identifiable generic chronotopes associated with certain social media narratives and identities, and Ulman was able to align the content and timing of her performance with them.

The settings of her posts also corresponded to these various stereotypical social media identities. Initially in the “cute girl” persona, many of the images are taken in what appears to be her bedroom or on her bed, with sunshine streaming in; then as she transitions into the “sugar baby” persona, we can see images in clothing boutiques, restaurants, and later the plastic surgeon’s office, with darker filters and even a nighttime skyscape; lastly, in her final

evolution into a “life goddess”, the posts depict well-lit brunch scenes and sophisticated interior design reference images. Evoking these recognizable time-space tropes, and their associated networked identities, Ulman invites her followers to witness the evolution of her narrative emplotment.

Ulman’s ability to recognize the appropriate codes (architext) associated with the narrative she wished to portray resulted in her successfully amassing a following, and also contributed to the deception and anger those followers felt when they discovered her story was not “real”. It is in fact the finality of *Excellences & Perfections*’ concluding post, a black and white image of a rose with the caption “The End”, that alerted followers to the true nature of the performance. By sharing this phrase, a common and recognized storytelling cue, Ulman again makes reference to the classical fictional narrative style, yet clashes with the signifying modes of the medium (a social media platform). One can argue that Ulman recognized the expected archetypal networked chronotope (a continuous timeline), and chose to break with the learned norms of the networking platform, betraying the expectations of her followers.

This conflict can be seen as a reflexive trigger that reminds the spectators/followers of the presence of the media through which they are experiencing the narrative. As noted by Gentes, across various media, narrative techniques of interruption and discontinuity can be applied to alert the spectator of the intellectual construction. By encountering the narrative interruption, spectators are prompted to engage in a reflexive experience. According to Gentes the “reflexive emphasis draws the spectator’s or reader’s attention to the formal materials and processes of media construction, by displaying the tricks of the trade, or introducing all kinds of violation with the narrative codes or genres” (Gentes 2019, 50). When considering Ulman’s work, this reflexivity can underline the presence of medium-specific narrative norms and the corresponding chronotopic or time-space genres.

Specifically, on Facebook and Instagram, the platforms’ chronological layout lends itself well to the unraveling of a personal life drama. Recalling Hayles medium-specific approach, we can recognize the impact of the particular media used in the production of this narrative (Hayles 2004). The nuanced yet impactful distinctions between different social media network affordances cannot be fully separated from the content itself, and thus play a central role in the stories users tell about themselves. Inversely, as supported by Blommaert’s interpretation of the indexical organization of specific

chronotopes, the particular time-space configurations (or affordances) of social media condition specific forms of identity enactment (Blommaert and De Fina 2017).

Could Ulman’s dramatic *mise-en-scène* typify a chronotope of a particular social media networked narrative? One of emotional revelation, a personal journey, the discovery of wellness, or female redemption and “appropriate” (profitable) self-exposure? We can recognize this chronotope echoed in more recent creative social media usages. Such as, the revealing of cyborg influencer *Lil Miquela*’s biographical narrative, in which through catastrophic data leak the cyborg learns she is not human and publicly questions the authenticity of her identity. These works follow the platform’s signifying strategies and behavioral norms to unfold stories of introspection, self-realization, and ultimately self-representation.

Discourse in Flux: Molly Soda

Now I would like to push the networked social media chronotope theory a bit further and apply it to an artist’s entire Instagram profile. Something which, for artist Molly Soda, has no predefined time limit. Although Soda’s Instagram profile’s timeline does not follow a traditional temporal plot arc (beginning, middle, end), she frequently makes reference to time. Her posts often acknowledge important past benchmarks as well as current and future events in her personal and professional life. Visiting her profile, we can gradually learn intimate aspects of her life history through the variously scattered images and captions that reveal bits and pieces of her past. There are codified trends on Instagram for sharing historical posts, such as the Throw Back Thursday “tbt” hashtag, which invites users to post an image from the past on Thursday. This trend can be seen as a unique and multileveled or indexical chronotope, in which the day of the week informs the sort of story users share; an image from the past. This chronotope reflects what Blommaert describes as orders of indexicality that “are recognized as such in particular chronotopic conditions where participants share the language-ideological valuations of indexicals, i.e., communicative aspects or resources such as ‘tropes’ ” (Procházka 2018).

Yet, in Soda’s case, although she occasionally uses the hashtag “tbt”, her posts referencing the past can occur at any time and because of her frequent use of more dated internet aesthetics, it is not always easy to place her

images and works in an accurate timeline. This sort of non-linear narrative timeline that weaves in references to the past within the flow of content production can be viewed as a more alternative or creative chronotope on the platform. For example, a post from April 2021 shares a screenshot of Soda's desktop with a photobooth image of herself with her mouth open, as though singing, alongside a YouTube video dated 2013 featuring a pink-haired Soda with a septum piercing in the same position. Her Instagram caption reads "I love them both". There is no clear explanation by the artist, but I understand this caption in relation to the two images of Soda to mean she loves both versions of herself, the current and the past. Remembering Ricœur's theories previously discussed, Soda's placement of this post within the flow of her Instagram timeline may be read as a form of self-employment, or the reconciling of sameness and change through a narrative identity.

In another chronotopic configuration, a previous post from November 2020, Soda celebrated six years of sobriety and shared eight different photos and videos of her sitting with her bedroom visible in the background. In each of the images she is dressed differently but she doesn't indicate when the photos were taken. Here again, we can recognize a common networked chronotope in which users share multiple images loosely related to an event, benchmark, season or everyday activity. This trend has most recently been named the "photo dump"² and has seen increasing popularity. This may be a common method of sharing on social media, yet it calls into question key narrative elements. Recalling Genette's theories concerning narrative order, duration, and frequency, we can consider that in this post Soda experiments with an iterative frequency. While her caption makes a singular reference to an ongoing event (her sobriety over the past six years), she shares eight similar yet distinct images, indicating a visual narration of multiple events. In this way, Soda maintains a sort of temporal flux in which she slips through multiple temporal dimensions.

Another example is a post from March 2021 in which Soda shared images from one of her first digital performances titled "Tween Dreams" from 2011. In her caption, she acknowledges the time that has passed since she began her social media "journey" and thanks her fans who have followed her for so long. This post highlights again the flexible temporal aspect of the media, as

²"The term 'photo dump' refers to a series of images uploaded in carousel format, and all loosely connected by a person's everyday experience." (Archer 2021)

Soda is able to flash back to this past event, *analepsis* (Genette 1972), while also placing the event within the fabric of her plot and thus, reflecting on her identity.

Finally, there are clear temporal and spatial narrative configurations associated with the camgirl genre and aesthetic, which Soda often evokes. Looking at previous camgirl themed works, they are set in the artists' bedrooms and are shared with a consistent and repetitive (if not constant) frequency. This behavior which can be classified as social media "oversharing" is a common negative criticism associated with camgirl performances, and can be seen as characteristic of the camgirl chronotope. Soda's invocation of the camgirl chronotope on Instagram addresses the related symbolic and critical themes associated while also integrating yet another identity into her overall Instagram narrative. This sort of self-expressive flux is present in other artists' social media usage as well. For example, American artist Martine Gutierrez's Instagram posts vary in relation to the archetypal identity her artistic practice is exploring at a certain time; from supporting her *Indigenous Woman* (2018) photographic project, to her Blond Bombshell persona for her VR exhibition *China Doll* (2021). For Soda and Gutierrez, activating multiple chronotopic genres correspond to diverse narrative identities.

Conclusion

Through these observations we examined how various artists engage with social media narrative chronotopes. In some cases, the traditional plot arc is emulated through fabricated narratives, such as in Ulman's work, others present continuous and non-linear timelines, as reflected by artist Molly Soda's work, which adhere to the platforms' codes while also introducing alternative narrative chronotopes. Ulman's work conformed to the temporal and spatial tropes to trigger the accurate narrative identity recognition, only to reveal the true simulated nature of her story; a performance piece. In this case, the appropriation of the social media narrative chronotope is used as a reflexive mechanism allowing followers to reflect on social media identity tropes and recognize the underlying semiotic time-space structures.

Molly Soda's work integrates alternative chronotopic genres into the flow of her Instagram timeline, creating the opportunity for multiple narrative identities to develop. Although Soda or Gutierrez do not subscribe to one particular chronotope or narrative identity, through the temporal multiplic-

ity of the platform’s affordances and their artistic expressions, they are able to challenge the existing semiotic structures and archetypes. In turn, this interruption of perceived archetypal or normative behavior can induce a reflexive experience for the viewer, bringing to the surface the conflict between “what we’re presenting [...] what we’re doing behind the screen” (Soda and Geffen 2018).

In these cases, not only do the artists activate chronotopic genres but they also expand the possibilities of narrative time-space configurations and redefine the discursive concepts. Enlisting literary discourse and structuralist theory to the study of contemporary artistic usages of social media, reveals the intrinsic relationship of time and space in networked narratives. The affordances of social media and their contextual behavioral norms create the opportunity for indexical space-time configurations. Contemporary artists such as Ulman and Soda recognize and reappropriate these generic chronotopes, highlighting their existence in order to create critical and reflexive works. Reflecting on these various artistic social media usages through a discursive and narratological lens, we can identify new and unique modes for story-telling, self-narration, emplotment, and identity construction.

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